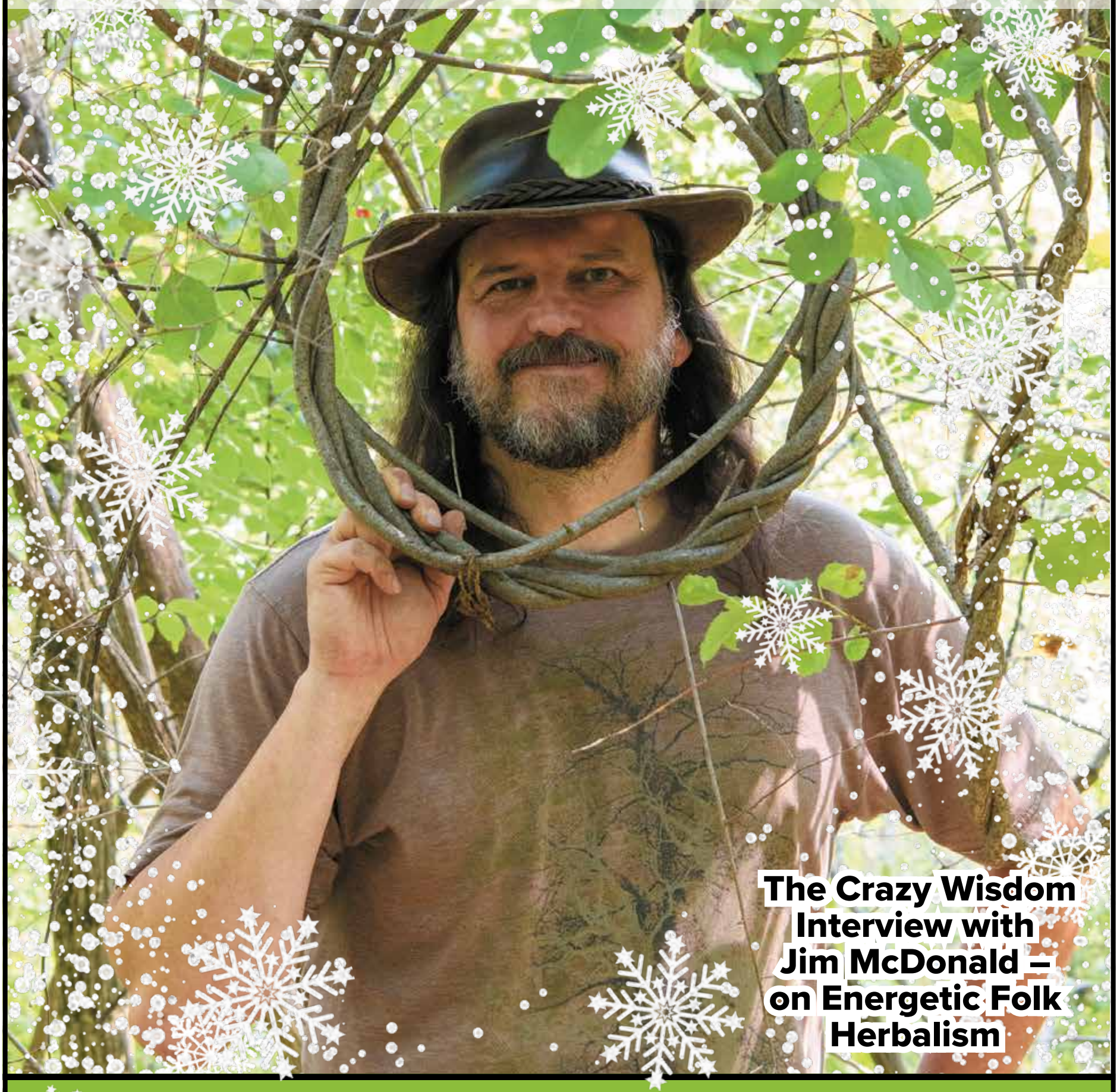
The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal

Southeastern Michigan's Conscious Living Magazine

FREE

January Through April 2025 - Issue 88



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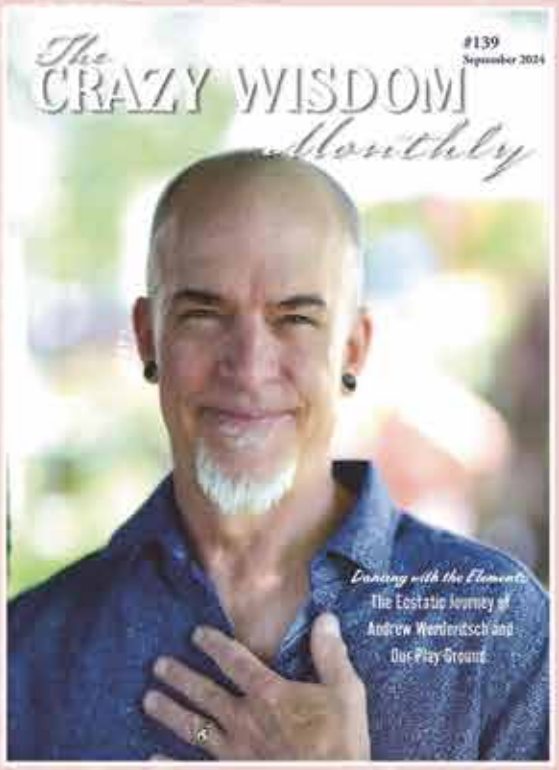

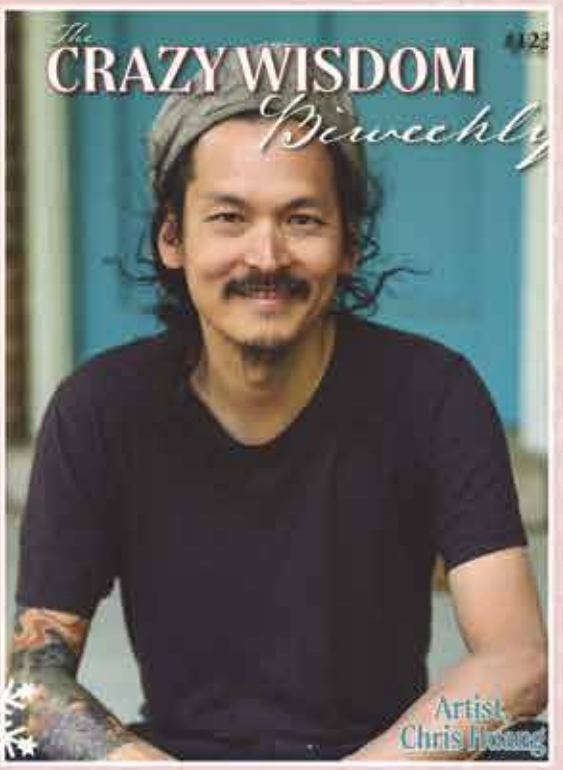

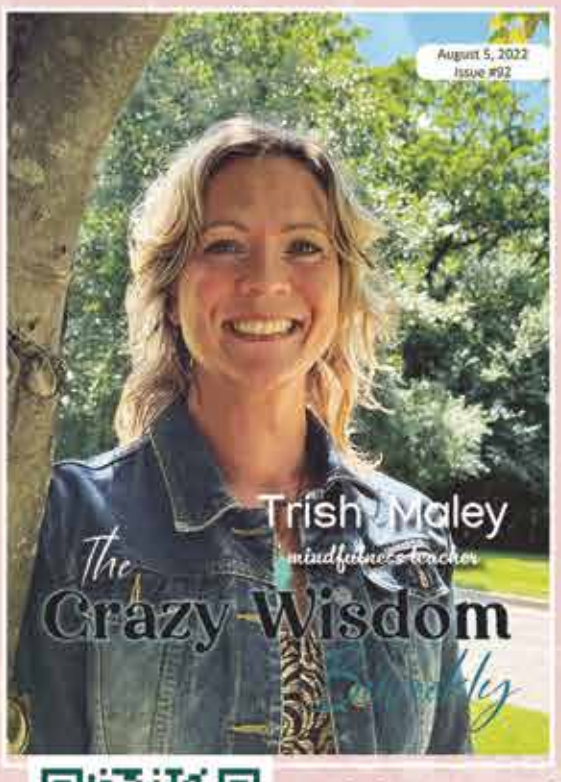

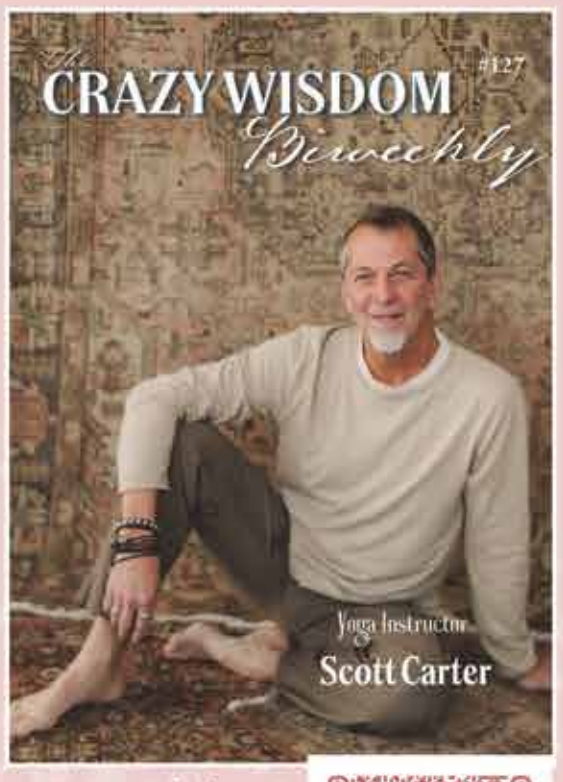

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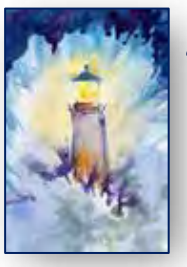

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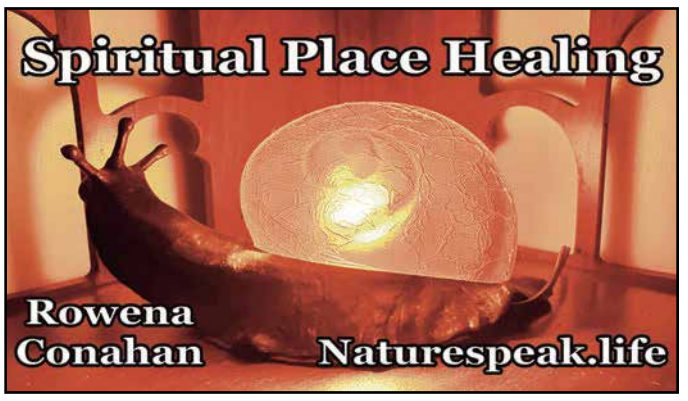

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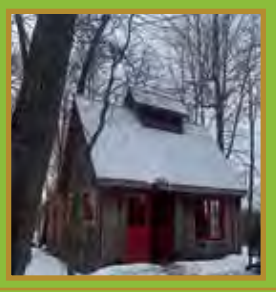

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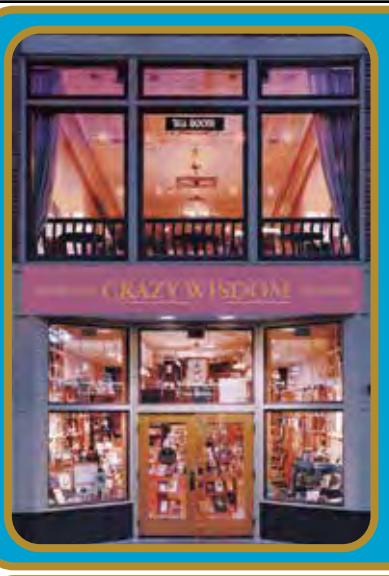

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This issue is distributed starting December 20, 2024..

The deadline for Free Calendar submissions for the May through August 2025 Issue #89 is Monday, March 17, 2025

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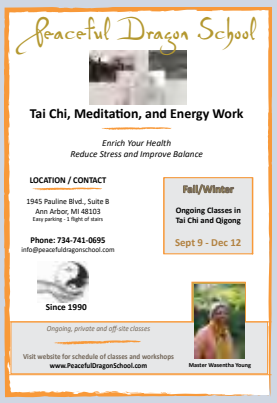

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—Susan Westhoff, Executive Director Leslie Science and Nature Center and Ann Arbor Hands on Museum

Over years and years of devoted service, ***Crazy Wisdom has grown into a magical, influential, and inspiring institution.*** It is one of the things that make Ann Arbor rate as a top place to live, nationwide, and an awesome place to put down roots. Thank you for all your determination and dedication over years and years, to increasing conscious living and quality of life, growing our community, and providing a platform to the highest of standards, for like minded people!

—Jody Tull, Be in Awe Yoga

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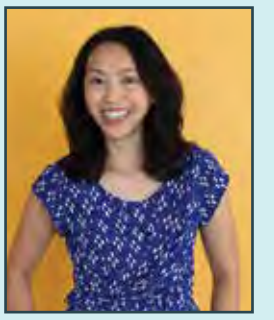
In appreciation of all the talent and hard work that goes into *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*, we highlight some of our contributors in every issue.

Meet Some of Our Creative Team

Samantha Beidoun is a stay at home mom to three; 14 and 3 year old daughters and a 13 year old son. Her outgoing-introverted spirit loves physical challenges like the DX-A2 half marathon, new experiences, and listening to anyone who has a story to be heard. When her preschooler allows her rest she can be found raising monarchs, crafting, baking, and over-sharing in personal essays. She lives in Dexter with her husband, children, two cats, and Peloton bike.



Edda Pacifico is an Ann Arbor-based, internationally published, portrait photographer.You can see her photograph's displayed at the University of Michigan Medical Center, Cancer Center, and CS Mott Children's Hospital. Aside from photography, she is passionate about travel. Follow her adventures on IG @Edda_.

Irena Barbara Nagler's first word was "book." She has been writing fiction, poetry, and essays since childhood, and has worked in univesity and public libraries for many years. Her other childhood dream was to dance. She is a founder of Nightfire Dance Theater, active since 1997, performing mythic and dream-based dance, and teaching environmental movement meditation. In writing, visual art, and dance, Nagler's approach is to unify and blend, gently dissolving barriers between worlds.

Audrey Rosanna Gabrielle Hall is a dirt witch. She grew up on a cattle farm in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains and was baptized in a creek. Practicing a healthy blend of materialism, occultism, and Appalachian folk magic, she performs cartomancy as Madame Brute and ritual music as Mother Behemoth. She is the Bull Woman of Ypsilanti and believes if you mind your own biscuits, life will be gravy. Look for her personal essay, Apostasy, on page 19.

Emily Springfield is a somatic wellness practitioner, small-scale herb farmer, and local food advocate based in Chelsea, Michigan. Her mission is to bring bountiful health to all through good food, good movement, and good community. Her herbs and tea blends are available through Fenhaven.com and Agricole Farm Stop in Chelsea. Check out her article on the state of medicinal herbs in Michigan on page 52.

Lisa Viger Gotte is a vegan artist, photographer, author, Vegan Life Coach Educator, and RYT 200 yoga teacher. She shows others how simple and delicious a plant-based diet can be at Planted365.com. Lisa lives in Chelsea and likes to draw and paint, cook, write, take lots of pics, eat lots of chocolate, and practice gratitude daily.

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Kindred Conversations

with Hilary Nichols

Filmmaker Christina Morales Hemenway

Article and Photos by Hilary Nichols

Courageous, kind, and creative in equal measure, Christina Morales Hemenway may be the most prolific feature filmmaker in Ann Arbor. She has five finished feature films and two more film projects currently in the works—and this is just one of her ongoing careers.

Morales Hemenway's work ethic and motivation dictates a dizzying number of projects on her plate at any given time. "I always have to have one project in development, one in pre-production, one in production, and a final project in the distribution phase," Morales Hemenway laughed. "At least." Writer, director, producer, actor, dancer, distributor, singer, event producer, fundraiser, entrepreneur, coach, and teacher is a long list of positions. Why do it all? I had to sit with Morales Hemenway to try to understand how all of this is possible.

Morales Hemenway's work ethic and motivation dictates a dizzying number of projects on her plate at any given time.

Christana Morales Hemenway has always been a director. Her creative ambitions started early in life. "I'd bribe the kids in my neighborhood with candy to be in my little theatrical productions, dance performances, and even a circus!" she shared. In high school she earned a full scholarship to study with the world-renowned mime Marcel Marceau. She was smitten with the form, and it seemed to suit her as well. "What is the difference between an actor and a star? An actor is one who acts. A star is a beaming light that shines throughout the universe. Be that," Marcel Marceau shared with Morales Hemenway and her fellow students.

Morales Hemenway took the famous encouragement to heart. She set her pursuits toward acting and completed her studies at the California Institute of the Arts with a BFA in Theater. But she quickly realized that, though she was well received on stage, acting wasn't her artform. "Once I became busier as an actor," she said, "I didn't like it as much as I thought I would." She discovered that the creative process of filmmaking was her true calling. "It was the writing and directing that really lit me up." So, she started her own production company.

Morales Hemenway has a bright cheerfulness with glossy, long dark hair, a giant smile, sparkling eyes, and an enthusiasm for life that lifts the room. She does not hide all the colors of her heart. She is true. We sit together in a circle of fellow creatives at Elemental Ecstatic Dance where she can be found most Sundays, and there she shared her honest experience as a single mom, a woman of a certain age, and a solo entrepreneur. She doesn't shy away from expressing her true joys as well as some of the frustrations. "It is a lot to carry," she shared about her filmmaking. "But I can't not do it. It is an obsession. It is my life force—the thing that gets me up in the morning. I need to be doing a lot. It is just my mode of operation. The work is what keeps me engaged in life." On her dining room table, her current writing projects are laid-out in strips of scenes that she shuffles into shape. A rack of costumes from her last film still sits in the front room, and a laptop balances on her lap as she continues to push forward on this season's focus. "I thrive on chaos," she added with a laugh, "Obviously."

Morales Hemenway has a bright cheerfulness with glossy, long dark hair, a giant smile, sparkling eyes, and an enthusiasm for life that lifts the room.

In 1992, right after college, Morales Hemenway founded Dancingstar Productions, with the mission of creating enlightening and uplifting films. "I want to feel better, not worse after going to the movies." She told me. "Feel Good films" is an apt category for her oeuvre listed on her IMDB profile. Her five feature films are "Autumn Leaves," "Dreammaker," "Angel Moon," "Bride+1," and "Get Real." Her feature film, "Dreammaker," won the Audience Choice Award or Best Feature film in every festival in which it has played and has screened in Los Angeles, Chicago, Louisville, Ann Arbor, and Rome, Italy.

"The process of filmmaking is a spiritual process. My films are my babies." Her overlapping workflow would confuse a full team of professionals, but she manages. "I have a whole system, from nuts to bolts. How to write the script, storyboard, and crafting the action, to shooting scheduling, angles, and the whole production process. I know the gamut," she said. "Through years of doing it the hard way, I wanted to capitalize on all the mistakes I have made." She started The Dancingstar Creative Academy to do that.

"Sharing the arts is what this is all about for me," she said. The newest aspect of Morales Hemenway's production company is offering young filmmakers the chance to participate in all the aspects of a project from conception to completion. "They can have hands-on experience on the film, and they get an IMDB credit on a feature film. [That experience] really helps people to break into this business." Her program has five students, and they are looking for five more. "We are currently looking for scholarships to cover the academy fee," she shared. ""Of course, our fiduciary sponsor is a 501C3, so people can give with tax write off," she is quick to affirm.

"This is an amazing company of actors and friends. I see it as a parallel to community theater. I always want to expand the feeling of community that people feel in collaborations on those stages." Clearly her cast and crew seem to feel the same way, as they respond to her many invitations to show up on the sidelines or in a starring role. The cast and crew and the locations are mostly local. Ann Arbor and the environs are a featured draw. "I hired Russ Collins to play the mayor of the Midwest, so that some people will go see it for him, or just be excited to see their own town, and recognize a wrong turn," she laughed. Her film Get Real was set in Milan and poked good fun at many recognizable tropes.

All of her films are available now to stream on Amazon Prime, Hulu, Tubi, and Apple TV. They are on a lot of platforms. But better yet, you can purchase straight from her own distribution site dancingstarproductions.com. "Presenting my films through my own site lets me do it my own way, and it is actually more valuable." Morales Hemenway is a big proponent of self-distribution. There are six films posted and counting.

"I have 12 feature films that are ready to go," Morales Hemenway mentioned. Yet the film that Morales Hemenway is working on now took precedence. This year Ann Arbor is celebrating its 200-year anniversary. "This project has support and timing. That's why it had to jump in the queue." It usually takes at least a year for a script to be ready to film. "This thing was really knocking on the door." Along with her co-writer, a 17-year-old writer named Trilian Krug, she noted, "There was such synchrony, this time it came together in two months. "Universal Chord" is about a 17-year-old girl who switches places with her then 17-year-old grandmother in 1969 in Ann Arbor.

While researching that era she found that women were not allowed to own property or have their own credit card. "Wow! It wasn't that long ago!" She drew a comparison to female filmmakers now—she still finds resistance in a largely male-dominated profession. "For example, the time that a camera operator took his direction from the male A.D." Morales Hemenway recalled, "Or when the cinematographer yelled, 'cut'— 'no,' that is my job. I had to remind him, again. I am the director."

"It is a lot to carry. But I can't not do it. It is an obsession. It is my life force. The thing that gets me up in the morning. I need to be doing a lot. It is just my mode of operation. The work is what keeps me engaged in life."
—Christina Morales Hemenway

Directing is a multifaceted undertaking. Morales Hemenway applies the tasks to more than her feature filmmaking. Her documentary "Poly views on Polyamory" is in its post postproduction phase. And during the pandemic she made a short comic film called "The Sock Story" just to share with her friends and fellow creatives. Along with a few of those friends, the effort ignited their interest to reinstate The Dancingstar Film Fest where they will present a program of uplifting short films. "Be on the lookout: submission instructions will be posted on Dancingstar.com soon," she encouraged. "It will be a place for new narrative filmmakers to cut their teeth and established professionals to make something fun." It is just another way for her to continue her calling. "I want to share films that are accessible to everyone—that everyone can resonate with." Films are one of our most meaningful communicators of our shared cultural language. Christina Morales Hemenway will continue to be a part of that crucial conversation. "I strive to share art that reminds us that we are all one."

Learn more about Christina Morales Hemenway and her films and projects on her website, DancingstarProductions.com.

Kindred Conversations continued...

Musician Kyler Wilkins and Ki5

The first time I experienced Kyler Wilkins' music I was mystified. I had to move toward the front of the audience to witness close-up all of the intricate and elegant sounds being amplified from a simple set up on stage. He was playing the Ann Arbor's SummerFest side stage in June 2022.

Kyler Wilkins is the one-man band known as Ki5, pronounced [kī] (rhymes with pie) five. The wall of sound he creates are all live sounds made with his voice in real time along with claps and snaps that he records and plays back to create the rhythm, melodies, harmonies and vocals overlapping through his Boss RC-505 loop station. The results are a mesmerizing musical experience that is unique each time as Wilkins layers up to 30 tracks of his beat boxing and vocal acrobatics in a free form improv arrangement. What goes into making a whole band with only one voice?

Kyler Wilkins is an enthusiastic, crisp, and inspired conversationalist. His love for his artform was heartwarming as he mused on all the elements that went into crafting his act. "I loved playing viola and guitar in school, but everything clicked when I started singing in the high school choir," Wilkins began.

Wilkins started training on the violin at Rudolf Steiner Elementary School in Ann Arbor and continued at Pioneer High School where he also joined the choir. In college at Michigan State, he joined the a capella group "State of 5ths" and found he could combine his musicality and his voice with beat boxing and vocal instrumentalism. He became co-director running rehearsals and arranging the group's music. "I am so grateful for what I learned early on from studying the violin—the power of harmony. It informed my musicality lifelong. Just putting two simple things together to make something new, watching sound compliment itself," he gushed. "I was training myself to become Ki5, though I didn't know it."

After college he turned to making music alone at home as a therapeutic experience. "I really missed singing with a group." When he discovered technology like loop stations, which can capture multiple parts for artists to craft intricate pieces by themselves, he was sold. "I saw others building their own multi-layered songs. I knew that was exactly what I needed to do."

His offerings are his own, but he doesn't gatekeep. Wilkins is more than willing to share his craft and pass on what he has perfected.

His relationship with the artform was only for himself at first. "I started out in my living room, as a way of balancing out the stress of work, with an hour or two every day." But quickly he started playing for others at open mics, in living rooms, and backyard shows. His act, Ki5 was named in 2016 for his first real gig, playing for a shop opening in Royal Oak. His bookings grew steadily from there as he added regular shows at 734 Brewery, Cultivate in Ypsilanti, and the Beer Grotto in Ann Arbor. Years of solo crafting prepared him to know not only his own voice, but his equipment intricately. "I have a system to organize the sounds, uploading a full set of inputs in each category to be at the ready." There are five different stacks, and each one can have unlimited layers. Vocal drum sounds are stacked, then a lyrical layer is added over an atmospheric layer. A single song has about thirty layers. "I control them in big groups, in my own system to template them out, so I can predict my choice." Wilkins described, "With my Boss RC-5 loop station, I became a one-man acapella group."

On stage Ki5 begins in silence and then starts recording live vocal sound clips like a conductor warming up all the instruments before starting the symphony. The individual sounds are then swirled and harmonized into an original and dynamic new piece. Live improv in front of a crowd seems risky. "It is scary and wonderful," Wilkins admitted. "If something comes out of my mouth I don't like, great. I won›t play that track again," he mused. "When you think about it, there is nothing to be afraid of, because nothing exists to compare it against. The only thing to compare it against is silence, right?"

I had never witnessed anything like what Wilkins creates. There is a sense of being invited into the complex mind of the creator. "The thing that I love about the spot that I am in is I get to do it my own way—Leaning into the idea that I am niche. There aren't a lot of examples of what I do—that is a really beautiful thing. I get to set my own example," Wilkins said. "To explore and push boundaries, and learn from others, and gather sounds from other places not trying to sound like any other traditional group. That is what Ki5 is. I am creating harmony from my own unique voice."

It was exhilarating to get to be witness to such an act of creation. There are no back tracks, no drum machines, no violin. He is not using a harmonizer or even a starting pitch. "Nope. It all lives inside of me," he assured. Like watching a live painter but with my eyes closed, I found myself falling into the musical creation and being carried through the soundscape.

Using this technique has freed Kyler Wilkins to make his work without having to coordinate a group. "This approach fights against the feeling that one person is not enough. I get to use the loop station to play with time and to express simultaneously. Every bass line, every melodic line, to vocal percussion, it is all there." He too seems surprised by the freedom. "With the loop station and Ki5 I get to share it all. I get to express the joy, and the beauty, and the heartache that lives inside me."

The process is more poetry than production. I ask him where the new songs come from. "It›s kind of a mystery even to me. At home I will just be doing improv for myself. I will start singing different lyrics that I didn't know were inside of me. I will speak something, record it, and repeat it. And then wonder, where did that thought come from? I asked myself, "Who would say this?" because there is a story here, but I don't think it is my story." Like a writer of fiction, Wilkins is a conduit for his creations. "I tapped into something real with the feelings. And other people tap into that."

His offerings are his own, but he doesn't gatekeep. Wilkins is more than willing to share his craft and pass on what he has perfected. "I teach live looping. I teach beatboxing. I teach songwriting through the Neutral Zone and on my own."

His classes provide young musicians a way to access their creativity without having to rely on a traditional route of a band or studio commitments. His unique production style and skills can be passed down, but there is more to Wilkins' gifts than technological know-how. With his spirit of kindness and encouragement he is a natural teacher. It is more than a job—what he offers his students is all of his heart. As he was preparing for a collaborative performance piece at Pathways to Success High School, one of his students told him that she was too nervous to go up in front of people. "She was a really good singer. I just told her, 'You literally have everything that you need already. All you have to do is bring that last little piece of yourself that believes in what you do, and you›re going to be just fine." His commitment goes above and beyond the musical craft. "I asked her, ‹Do you trust me?' It wasn't a question if she could sing. That's rarely the concern. "It is just a question of if you can walk yourself up there and show up for yourself."

"The things that I love about the spot that I am in, I get to do it my own way. Leaning into the idea that I am niche. There aren't a lot of examples of what I do—that is a really beautiful thing. I get to set my own example."

—Kyler Wilkins

You can stay in the loop here: ki5loops.com/about on Facebook at facebook.com/Ki5Loops or on Spotify: at open.spotify.com/artist/30F9SM05K7KGA2vGfwDYJy?si=cvzV-e0HQEuFotb3dKyhRA.

Out of My Comfort Zone

Jennifer Lee Stein, MA, LPC, is a psychotherapist and Enneagram coach in Ann Arbor, Michigan. She studied French and English at the University of Michigan, early childhood education at Waldorf Teacher Education Eugene, and received an M.A. in Transpersonal Counseling Psychology from Naropa University. She is passionate about blending the gifts of therapy and spirituality, and empowering others to heal and reach higher levels of awareness.

A Return to Meaningful Friendship

By Jennifer Lee Stein

I met my friend Leah when we moved into the same dorm our freshman year at the University of Michigan. One day, after yet another bleak lecture on French Existentialism, Leah, came up to me and asked if I wanted to walk around campus. Leah was intelligent, humorous, and inquisitive. We became fast friends, and eventually a wider circle of friends formed around us—we played frisbee at the Arb. We studied at the library or at Amer's Cafe. There were lots of parties.

> Leah and I bonded over digging into the deeper meaning of life. We loved analyzing and theorizing about psychological motivation and behavior, applying sociological theory to the throngs of students around us.

Leah and I bonded over digging into the deeper meaning of life. We loved analyzing and theorizing about psychological motivation and behavior, applying sociological theory to the throngs of students around us. One of our classmates told us we were like Angela from My So-Called Life—we were forever extracting meaning from anything and everything, amateur philosophers and psychologists. There were many late nights staying up playing off each other's ideas, having revelations, and readying ourselves for the frontier of adulthood that was on the horizon. I felt really understood and appreciated by Leah, and whenever I find that in a friendship, I cherish it.

After graduation, we stayed in touch and visited each other when we both moved to other areas of the country. I was a bridesmaid in her wedding. She made the trek to see me in one of my plays. Then, after 13 years of friendship, I didn't hear from her when I felt it was her move to reach out, and because I felt deeply insecure at the time, I didn't want to initiate contact. I thought about confronting her. Texting her "Are you mad at me?" "Are you okay?" "I miss you." But what if I had done something to hurt her? What if she just decided I was annoying or burdensome? Was there something wrong with me? I felt too uncertain and ashamed; so instead of investigating, I told myself it was her loss, and I moved on with my life.

Years passed. I taught at a Waldorf school in Vermont, then pursued an M.A. in Counseling Psychology at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. Right before the pandemic hit, I decided to move back to Michigan to start my career. During the days of quarantine, I had time and space to reflect on my life. I started to think about what was important to me—friends, family, what I wanted for my life, what I wanted to repair in it. I thought of Leah.

I began writing letters to Leah, but I never sent them. They collected in a drawer in my desk. I missed her, but I didn't want to be the first one to reach out. If she declined to speak to me, the rejection would have stung. Even worse, it would alter the image I wanted to maintain as a strong, independent person. I didn't want to be humiliated. I didn't want to appear weak to myself or others.

I have spirituality and therapy to thank for the emotional evolution I have experienced. Through a combination of Vipassana meditation which I learned at Deep Spring Center in 2003 and IFS therapy which helped me access healing spiritual energy from within, I was able to become less reactive, create more spaciousness within my mind and heart, and heal past pain, shame, and trauma. I then learned about the Enneagram, an ancient system that describes cosmic patterns and natural processes and which has evolved into a profoundly accurate personality system. The Enneagram showed me my tendency as a Type Four towards self-loathing and a larger than average fear of rejection. My protective parts stave off rejection through causing me to preemptively leave anyone or any situation where abandonment feels imminent. They also shore up a superiority complex in order to defend against feeling inferior.

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I began writing letters to Leah, but I never sent them. They collected in a drawer in my desk. I missed her, but I didn't want to be the first one to reach out. If she declined to speak to me, the rejection would have stung.

It was one thing to learn about these things, and quite another to really internalize them. As I kept circling around sending a letter to Leah, I started to think about the lessons I had learned in a new way. I saw that my pride was spilling in, and telling me, "Don't reach out, that looks desperate and weak; that puts you on the inferior plane."

But something was changing in me. I could now recognize what was happening, and I didn't want my pride, my insecurity, my fear to control me anymore. These things that I clung to had caused me to lose a close friend. In order to step out of my comfort zone I needed to go to an undefended place and stand in vulnerability, knowing that whatever pain arose, and as uncomfortable as that would be, I would be okay. I realized that I would have Spirit carrying me always, and that I would be able to unconditionally love the parts of me that feel so inherently defective.

I made it through the pandemic, and still, the unsent letters to Leah sat there. Then I found out a friend of mine had died, and I grieved. A few months later, another acquaintance my age died. They were my age, and they were gone. I began a new letter.

. . . As I've been processing the death of two of my peers, one a year older, one a year younger, both beautiful, inspirational women, my mind keeps turning to our friendship. Perhaps, because not speaking with someone acts as a kind of death, but even more practically, one of us, though very unlikely, could die before speaking to each other again. The pandemic surfaced the pain around not being on speaking terms with you. It's acted as some kind of cosmic sign-post—there has been a loss and perhaps it's time to mend it, or even have a single talk to acknowledge each other. . . .

In order to step out of my comfort zone I needed to go to an undefended place and stand in vulnerability, knowing that whatever pain arose, and as uncomfortable as that would be, I would be okay.

When I finished the letter, I put it down and picked up the phone and dialed but got voicemail. Leah quickly called me back, and finally, after ten years, we exclaimed "Hello! It's been so long! How are you?!" We ended up talking for three hours that night. We reminisced, we updated each other, and at long last addressed why we had lost contact in the first place. We realized that there had been a big misunderstanding, and we resolved it through hearing each other's perspectives. With that rupture healed, we were friends once again. We've talked every few months since then, and it has felt like old times—we laugh, we analyze, we explore interesting topics, but we also get to understand each other in this new phase of life. Now, I'm happy to say, when I think of Leah, I smile.

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The Perks of Being a Perky Wallflower — Finding Love Through a Speed Date

Article and Photos By Cashmere Morley

Over the buzz of both hops and chatter there is a cow bell. The noise can be a spell-breaker or a tension-reliever depending on who is sitting in front of you.

Over the buzz of both hops and chatter there is a cow bell. The noise can be a spell-breaker or a tension-reliever depending on who is sitting in front of you. The cowbell means your six minutes have concluded. It's time to turn to your clipboard of names and scrawl some notes— to quickly decide if the stranger in front of you is worth a seventh minute (or perhaps, even, a second date) before the next date sits down. Welcome to a Perky Wallflower Speed Dating session.

You may have seen the guerrilla-marketing for The Perky Wallflower in the form of plastered flyers on light poles downtown Ann Arbor, or stickers slapped on the sides of gas station pumps. The name immediately evokes the question: how can one be both effervescent and subdued?

I think it might surprise you to know that the founder of Perky Wallflowers, Adia, is only 15. What began as a school project for then 12-year-old Adia has blossomed into a local matchmaking event for people from aged twenty into their late sixties. Adia wanted to ensure that the Perky Wallflower experience was crafted specifically for both personality types: the outgoing and the quiet can both have a chance to find love. The name is a play off of this idea, and she hopes that it encourages all personality types to show up and give speed dating a try.

Adia and her mom host The Perky Wallflower three to four times a month. "My favorite part about running The Perky Wallflower Speed Dating events is helping people connect, even if it's not on a romantic level, because everyone needs companionship," said Adia. "I think it's important for people to have a chance to form relationships, and it makes me so happy and brings me so much joy to be a part of that. Also, I love getting to run the business with my mom and getting to spend time with her."

"Before they begin [the speed date], we give everyone a set of questions that can ignite a spark [through conversation]," said Sara, "We want to avoid questions that can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no' and instead ask questions like 'How would your friends describe you?' … It's more about trying to get [the date] to really talk about who they are as a person. Because, you know, you get six minutes total, but it's really only about three minutes apiece."

Whether your personality leans more toward the "perky" or the "wallflower" portion of the moniker, Sara agreed that this is an event catered toward anyone trying to find love. The mother-daughter duo take great care in making sure the atmosphere is relaxed and welcoming so everyone can show up as their most relaxed and authentic self.

“We don't just want to take your money. We really want you to find somebody. That's why we're doing this,” said Sara. “We're really big on connecting. We love it when we hear about success stories. We’ve had marriages. People have kept in contact with us and let us know they’re still together. I think that really sets us apart [from other dating apps and events].”

The structure of the speed date is also what pulls people into The Perky Wallflower and keeps them coming back. Each session is arranged by age bracket. The concept is simple; a pool of potential romantic matches, equal counts of men and women, all gather at Erratic Ale in Dexter on their assigned date. The women are assigned seats and remain seated the entire duration of the event. The men trade seats each time the cowbell rings.

If a date isn’t showing signs of a spark, Sara doesn’t like to interfere. She feels that even silence is an important part of the speed dating process, and dates can learn just as much from lack of a connection as they can from a blossoming conversation.

However, if at any point you feel uncomfortable during a date or have perhaps already been to The Perky Wallflower before and see a date you don’t want to talk with again, you are free to grab a drink at the bar or talk to Sara and Adia during that six-minute interval.

Questions are freeform, but the better questions you ask, the more you know if the person sitting in front of you is a potential romantic match or just a pleasant conversation. As Sara said, “this isn’t an interview. But asking good questions is the key to success.”

In between dates, you are given a clipboard to record notes on your suitors. These notes can help you record if you’d like to see the person again, but they can also serve as feedback for the person sitting in front of you after the speed dating has concluded.

In a world oversaturated with love stories about partners meeting over a blue light screen, Sara knew there was a desire for in-person connection.

What began as a school project for then 12-year-old Adia has blossomed into a local matchmaking event for people from aged twenty into their late sixties.

Adia Clemm and her mother Sara

The Perks of Being a Perky Wallflower — Finding Love Through a Speed Date

If you end up going on a speed date and are on the fence between giving someone a "yes" or passing over them, Sara suggests going with your gut. A *maybe* means there's a spark, a spark could turn into a flame, but only if you're willing to give it a chance.

"We've had people write feedback such as 'didn't make eye contact' or 'didn't have much to say'. We don't usually share feedback unless someone asks for it, but if someone comes up to us and says 'I didn't get any matches,' it can be helpful to share with them some of the insight that other people have written down during their date. Some people need a bit more coaching than others."

Sara met her husband speed dating pre-pandemic during a speed dating event in Ann Arbor. That location shut down during the pandemic, but for Sara, the seed had been planted. In a world oversaturated with love stories about partners meeting over a blue light screen, Sara knew there was a desire for in-person connection. Because she was living that meet-cute story in real-time, she knew that other people would benefit from an opportunity to meet their next partner in a situation that wasn't a sterile dating app environment.

"We didn't see that there was any competition [for an event like this], coming out of the pandemic. We have some friends that are single, and we were just seeing how hard it was to connect, and especially around the pandemic, but then coming out of it, no one knew how people felt or how to talk to each other. We wanted to make a safe space for people to make that connection again."

When the school project arrived, both Sara and Adia recognized it as the perfect opportunity to launch The Perky Wallflower. While the inception of the event may come from Sara's own life experiences, The Perky Wallflower is Adia's brainchild: she came up with the name, the logo, the website, and she organizes all the events. All of the proceeds go toward her college fund. A ticket for admission is a nonrefundable $25.

Sara said that there have been repeat suitors who keep coming back to The Perky Wallflower because they are destined to find love through the speed date setting. Sara recalls one man who was "convinced" that this was the format he would find love.

"He's said, 'I know what I want, and I'm convinced that when I find it, I will know.' He was a scientist, so self-admittedly a bit nerdy. And he was like, 'it takes a special person to love my nerdiness.' And he found another scientist at our event! It's so funny, she texted me the other day and told me that they watch sci-fi movies together and dress up for different events. That's the kind of story we love to see!"

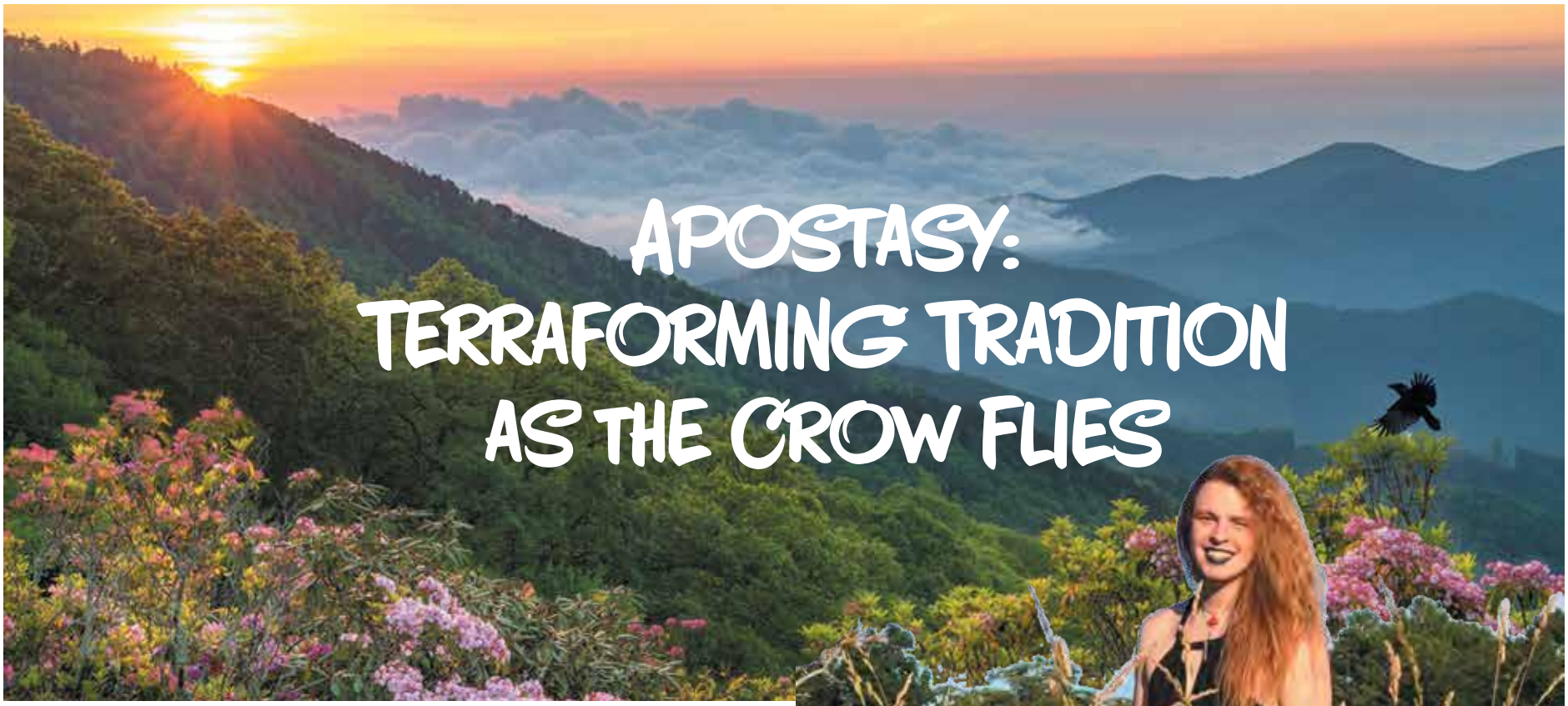
Right now, The Perky Wallflower is held at Erratic Ale, but Sara hopes to branch out a bit in the future to other locations. They are always looking for people of all ages to come out and try a date, so Sara encourages everyone to give it a chance if they are curious about a new way to meet a potential romantic partner.

"You do have to be vulnerable. You are putting yourself out there, but it is fine. Most of the feedback we receive is people telling us they had a good time and want to come back," said Sara. "It's beautiful because we get people from all different walks of life. You're always meeting different people—which even just that in itself—getting out of your house and meeting other people— consider that a win even if you don't make a connection. My one piece of advice is to just try it once."

If you end up going on a speed date and are on the fence between giving someone a "yes" or passing over them, Sara suggests going with your gut. A *maybe* means there's a spark, a spark could turn into a flame, but only if you're willing to give it a chance.

"I hope people leave our events with a greater sense of connection with others and a new experience that was hopefully fun," added Adia.

To experience The Perky Wallflower, visit their website at theperkywallflower.com and use the contact form to sign up for an event. You can keep up with them on Facebook @theperkywallflower.



APOSTASY: TERRAFORMING TRADITION AS THE CROW FLIES

By Audrey Hall

"I maintain that truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect." —Jiddu Krishnamurti

Organized religion has often caused a bad taste in the mouths of self-proclaimed free-thinkers throughout history. Today we hear many people say they are "spiritual but not religious" with a certain smug tone—implying they've freed themselves from the mass dogma of whatever church they've long since diverged from. I certainly cannot fault anyone for this as I have been blazing my own trail of spiritual truth from a very young age, but I encourage reflection on the ways in which our unique connection (or lack thereof) to the mystic is shaped by patterns learned from the very traditions we hope to eschew. So many atheists with Christian backgrounds engage in the evangelical practice of sharing their perspective in relentlessly condescending ways. So many spiritualists organize themselves in ways learned from the churches they were raised in while continuing to bemoan those very churches as backward and oppressive. While, of course, we can build and improve upon these familiar patterns, engaging in them unconsciously often holds unintentional consequences both politically and personally.

Today we hear many people say they are "spiritual but not religious" with a certain smug tone—implying they've freed themselves from the mass dogma of whatever church they've long since diverged from.

Apostasy isn't easy. I grew up in a rural community in the foothills of the Smokey Mountains. We attended a backwoods United Methodist church which, as far as backwoods religion goes, was not the worst. While I was not barraged every Sunday with hellfire, brimstone, speaking in tongues, or snake handling, our church services were characterized by oppressive silence both literally and philosophically. Alienation and gossip were the means by which order was enforced. All are condemned to whatever degree one cannot conform. While Hell wasn't necessarily a hot topic at the pulpit, at a certain young age we were taught about eternal damnation for all those who are not saved. Since we aren't baptized at birth in this tradition, I was overcome with fear. At a young age I repented of my sins at the altar, the church laid hands on me, and I was baptized in a creek. I was warned to be careful of the leeches on the rocks, which was kind of funny considering I was there to be "washed in the blood" of none other than Jesus Christ himself. They dunked me in that cold freshwater stream, and everyone praised the Lord, but I felt nothing.

I fondly remember my first steps toward abandoning the mantle of Christianity. I recall a friend expressing to me that she did not believe in God, and I had to make peace with the fact that she would go to Hell for this. Rather, I made peace with the fact that she would not go to Hell as she was clearly a wonderful person. Soon after I discovered a book called the *Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff and found myself enamored with the Taoism as described therein. Emerging from Christianity into an ancient Chinese philosophy, I soon acquired an English translation of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* and began to call myself a Taoist. This shift in my thinking was liberating but also isolated me in my Bible Belt hometown and backwoods Methodist church. In pursuit of apostasy, I had cut myself off from the community afforded by conformity and became desperate for fellowship.

Upon encountering other American Taoists in the wild after leaving my hometown, I noticed a pattern: they were white, they were male, and they were intellectually small. I found this deeply concerning and began to reflect on my spiritual identity as a white colonizer consuming an eastern tradition I first learned of from a book by yet another American white man. Eventually, I identified myself as a materialist, honoring the ways in which I'd been educated and empowered by my study of Taoism while simultaneously acknowledging my lack of cultural context in my attempt to practice as a Taoist.

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Moving forward in time, my atheism became anti-theism, and I became more and more closed off spiritually while also more and more lonely as a spiritual person. As much as I buried my head in the ground, I never left the spiritual plane of Appalachian folk religion. Finally, my heart was opened as I found fellowship in Ypsilanti among fellow apostates of Christianity seeking answers elsewhere. Suddenly, spirituality felt accessible and safe, no longer riddled with the torments of being a non-believer in the Bible Belt and full of encouragement toward a unique exploration of the mystic. However, I also began to observe patterns similar to the trappings of western consumption of eastern thought. This led me to dig into the history of the New Age.

My research took me past the 1960s and past the Golden Dawn into the bizarre drama of the Theosophical Society. Herein I saw the most brazen and crass iteration of Christian Apostasy in Eastern Clothing in the form of organized religion. Not only did the society seek to commodify and cater a buffet of eastern traditions to the pseudo-intellectual colonizer, but also form an international network in hopes of garnering political influence against the

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Featured readers

January 22 - Katherine Edgren has authored four collections of poetry, the most recent being *Keeping Out the Noise*. Her work has appeared in *Coe Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review, Third Wednesday*. Before retirement, she headed a department at University of Michigan Health Service and served as a City of Ann Arbor Council Member.

January 22 - Leslie Schultz has five collections of poetry; *Geranium Lake: Poems on Art and Art-Making* is her most recent. Her poetry has appeared widely in *Poet Lore, Able Muse,* and other journals. She also publishes photographs, essays, and fiction, and happily mucks about in a garden plagued by shade and rabbits.

February 26 - Ron Koertge has had poems twice in *Best American Poetry* and grants from the NEA and California Arts Council. His novels for young adults won two P.E.N. awards. An animated film made from his flash fiction, *Negative Space*, was shortlisted for the 2018 Academy awards. Billy Collins calls his presentations "deliciously smart and entertaining."

March 26 - Jeff Duncan has written a memoir about growing up in Tulsa, three books of poetry, and numerous plays for kids as Playwright-in-Residence at Wild Swan Theater, and for adults at Performance Network. While teaching literature and writing for four decades at EMU, he wrote a book on Emerson and essays on Transcendentalists.

April 23 - Shonda Buchanan is author of the memoir, ***Black Indian,*** and of forthcoming books: ***The Lost Songs of Nina Simone*** and ***Children of the Mixed Blood Trail***. She is a California Arts Council Established Artist Fellow, a PEN Emerging Voices Fellow, and Oxfam Ambassador. She teaches English at Western Michigan University. shondabuchanan.com

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https://cwcircle.poetry.blog/

tide of Christianity. While one might applaud them for striking out against the oppressive regime of Christian influence, it is unignorable how clearly they follow the model of organized religion—right down to the draconian pursuit of power.

The true tipping of the ship came from their choice to fulfill the bizarre prophecy of Helena Blavatsky, an apostate of Russian Orthodoxy, regarding a World Teacher. This messianic figure would, according to Blavatsky, bring an end to dogma and usher in the next stage of human evolution. In some ways, this sounds lovely! In other ways, this sounds like the coming of the Antichrist from the Book of Revelation. Regardless, after Blavatsky's death, the leaders of the society chose to groom a fourteen-year-old Indian boy with special needs to become said World Teacher. This boy's name was Jiddu Krishnamurti. They formed an organization around him called the Order of the Star in the East to herald his coming as the World Teacher, and for a decade he followed their agenda before declaring "truth is a pathless land" and dissolving the Order. "The coming had gone wrong," claimed the man who discovered Jiddu Krishnamurtii. The messiah had become an apostate!

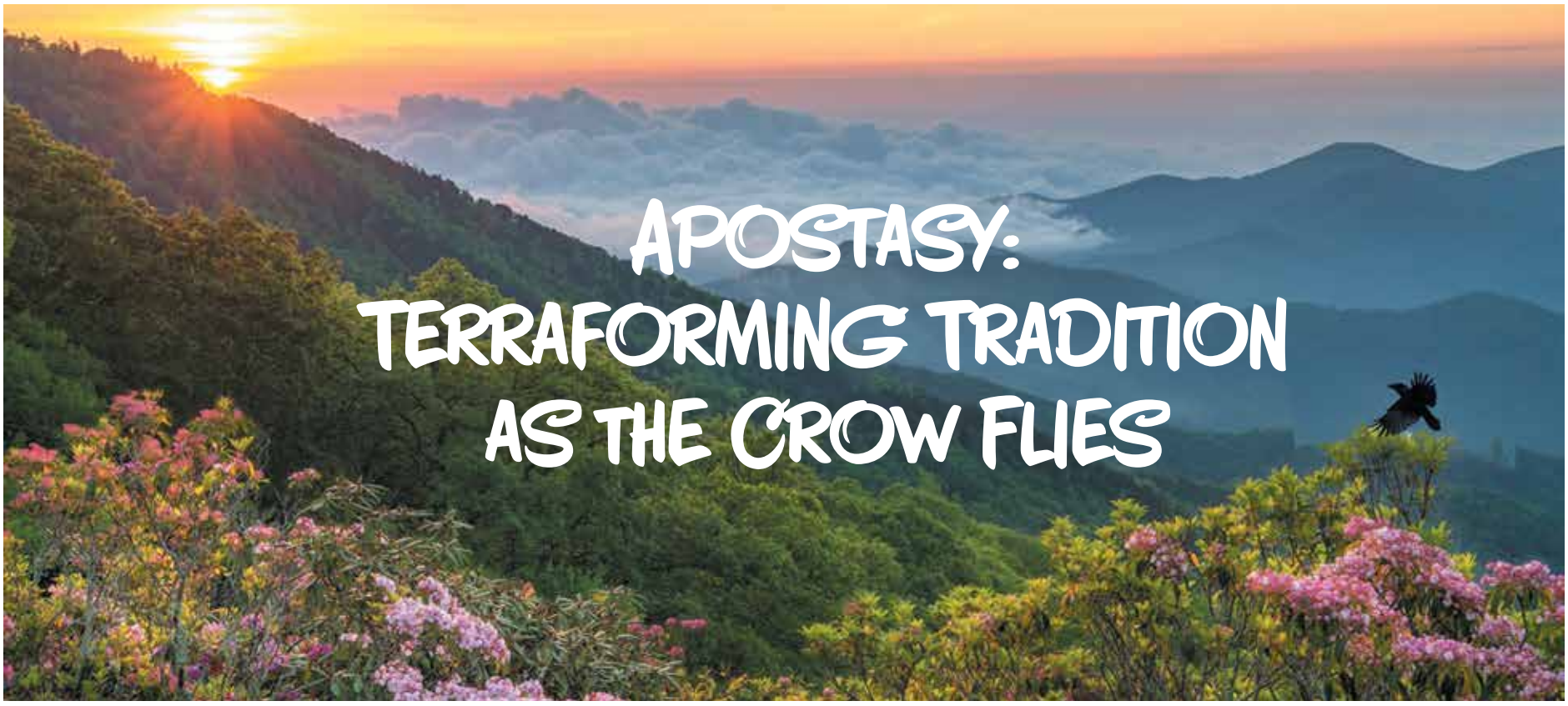
I was astonished by this story, seeing reflections both in my own journey as someone indoctrinated from a young age into religious tradition and in the culture of the New Age around me. A contradiction became clearer than ever: the mysticism of the individual and the desire for fellowship

I was astonished by this story, seeing reflections both in my own journey as someone indoctrinated from a young age into religious tradition and in the culture of the New Age around me. A contradiction became clearer than ever: the mysticism of the individual and the desire for fellowship. Organizations formed out of a need for spiritual community holistically forming money-making agendas that rival the mega-churches of Joel Olsteen alongside lone practitioners so lost in their own world of mysticism they could not connect with community at all. These are of course extreme examples of the negative as this contradiction is naturally resolved through diverse communities of unique practitioners finding common ground and supporting one another's journey. I have found the latter to be the majority by and large in Ypsilanti.

This still leaves the question of how we navigate apostasy as colonizers when eastern thought seems so ripe for the picking. Even when we leave the East alone, many apostates become drawn to appropriating other traditions closer to the imperial core, such as the very cultures we are actively colonizing as settlers. Many closed practices fall prey to tourism from white people and others become misrepresented and misunderstood as they are stolen and commodified for consumption. This raises the question: where do we turn when the traditions we are raised in no longer suit us? What templates can we follow without stepping on the toes of people who are already disenfranchised?

First of all, cultural appropriation is far from the only interaction we can have with traditions and philosophies outside of our own culture. We can appreciate, honor, and learn from all sorts of cultures through the course of our lives and may be better for it, as long as we avoid claiming them as our own. Most importantly, we should not be exploiting these cultures for profit.

Second, we can take a chapter from Krishnamurti's book and embrace choiceless awareness. So much of our desire to hodge-podge colonized traditions into a fusion restaurant of enlightenment comes from the lack of identity facing the apostate, particularly Christians of European descent.



APOSTASY: TERRAFORMING TRADITION AS THE CROW FLIES

Rather than focusing on constructing an identity outside of our own cultural traditions, questioning the need for identity and thereby dissolving the functions that lead us to choose can reduce conflict. If we don't choose to represent ourselves as one thing or another, we further embrace the ever-changing shapeless nature of truth. The less we think we know, the better!

Lastly, in my own experience I have found deep serenity in lifting my head from the sand and facing the spiritual tradition I was raised in. Thus began a process of terraforming Appalachian folk religion as a spiritual plane to make a home for myself as a unique individual. While not fully embracing choiceless awareness, which Krishnamurti himself said is impossible, I have ceased to choose truths outside of what forms holistically between mystic and myself. Therein I find a great deal of creative agency and personal power.

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Terraforming with aspirations of choicelessness does not necessarily result in a perfect spiritual perspective. Try as we might, wrestling with the toxic patterns of our spiritual upbringing as well as the various biases resulting from our proxy to white supremacy is a lifelong process. Within my own white Protestant background, there is a deep well of misogyny, antisemitism, racism, homophobia, ableism, and more that must be addressed as part of the ongoing process of finding my home within this culture. I do not believe Protestantism or even white people to be unique in these patterns of bigotry, but this is the path of truth relevant to me. This is part of why taking on aspects, or even the entirety of other traditions, without continuously doing the work of uprooting these biases can result in ignorant, irreverent, and exploitative relationships to the very spiritual knowledge we seek to learn from.

On the positive, I have experienced a great deal of spiritual growth through terraforming my spiritual plane. I have recalled what first drew me toward Taoism which was the feeling that God is not a creator or the personification of the infinite but a river flowing. Similar to but not the same as the Tao, I call this concept the Big River, and I am grateful for Lao Tzu's insights allowing me to better understand my own relationship to the mystic. I have dived deeply into the folk magic of Appalachia learning to use *The Bible* as a spell book and perform divination with playing cards. I have undertaken intense ritual work to establish myself as Mother Behemoth, a veritable shapeshifting experiment that's allowed me to push back on the spiritual warfare that's plagued my psyche since birth. I have used this power to make God and the Devil my familiars, and every day I take new steps toward enlightenment on my own terms.

Fellowship remains a riddle unsolved, but I have found such an incredible community that loves me just as I am. Many of us are apostates, and not just of the white settler variety, for which I am very grateful. Every unique perspective brings us closer to spiritual truth. We may not make a great deal of money in the way we organize ourselves, but we've created a vast and colorful cosmos between one another that holds many paths. I am so grateful for apostasy, so thankful for the art of terraforming without choice, and so thankful for Jiddu Krishnamurti boldly standing against the indoctrination of his youth. His wisdom is in my eyes a golden source of inspiration for the New Age. After all, he never actually denied being the World Teacher.

Audrey Rosanna Gabrielle Hall is a dirt witch from the foothills of the Smoky Mountains raised on a cattle farm and baptized in a creek. She studies cartomancy as well as Appalachian folk magic. For readings and services in witchcraft, she is Madame Brute, the Bull Woman of Ypsilanti. She performs bestial chant rituals as Mother Behemoth. You can contact her about readings and/or rituals at brunhildabrute@gmail.com.

The Magical Community of ConVocation

By Catherine Carr

On February 20 through 23, 2025, ConVocation will celebrate its 30th year as a Michigan convention for magical people. First founded in 1995, ConVocation has been hosted in various hotels around southeastern Michigan before finding its new home in Ypsilanti in 2024. Moira Payne, ConVocation 2025's Program Chair and President of the Magical Education Council of Ann Arbor, hopes this new home will be permanent.

On February 20 through 23, 2025, ConVocation will celebrate its 30th year as a Michigan convention for magical people.

"We needed a new convention center that could accommodate our growing attendance," Payne told me in our interview. "And the Marriott Ypsilanti Eagle Crest is the perfect fit. It's a hotel designed around a convention center, with surrounding hotels to accommodate overflow guests once our hotel block is booked up. The hotel staff have been amazingly supportive, even coming in to attend panels."

"It started out as an event for Pagans," Payne recalled, "but now it's really for all people interested in the magical arts. A relative of mine who is Christian went last year, and she found her people. She found people who were talking to each other about channeling Mother Mary."

With an astoundingly diverse schedule featuring over 250 classes, including full programs designed for children and a separate track for teens, ConVocation really does feel like a small village. There are drum circles and rituals throughout the weekend and two masquerade balls. The first is for the children followed later the same evening by a masquerade ball for adults where attendees go all-out on expressing their magical selves in costume and dance.

"We have a Divination Den now too," Payne told me. "In a lot of other townships, we weren't allowed to do that—many have bans on 'fortune telling' for money. But Ypsilanti doesn't, which is another reason why this location is perfect. We'll have a room full of diviners practicing different spiritual arts, in addition to the vendors' hall. People love it."

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"We have a room designed for neurodivergent accessibility," Payne continued. "It's a sacred, quiet space. We also have a Chalice Well Room—that's an alternative to a 12-step program for addiction recovery. They hold open and closed meetings and programming throughout the conference for those who are struggling with substance abuse or who know someone who is."

"There's such a wealth of knowledge here. I really enjoy seeing how other people journey into their spiritual seeking." — Moira Payne

Moira Payne — ConVocation 2025's Program Chair and President of the Magical Education Council of Ann Arbor, and Michigan's 2024 Pagan of the year

"We have a designated nursing room available with a space to change babies and activity programming for children aged five and up. We also have a gaming room for low-key social engagement. There are options like Cards Against Humanity for more casual play with Dungeons and Dragons in the evening. Last year that was a real hit with teens and adults alike. It was heartwarming to see them all playing together."

Payne also describes a team of "guardians"—convention volunteers who are trained in energy work and spiritual arts to provide grounding and spiritual first

aid to attendees. "They're not security staff. They're not armed. But they're there to keep attendees safe–physically and spiritually."

The 250+ classes are taught by magical practitioners from across cultures and across the world, for audiences ranging from elementary school and family friendly workshops to adults-only classes addressing the most advanced and sensitive types of magic.

The 250+ classes are taught by magical practitioners from across cultures and across the world, for audiences ranging from elementary school and family friendly workshops to adults-only classes addressing the most advanced and sensitive types of magic.

This year's guests of honor will include renowned witchcraft author Christopher Penzack, Priestess Stephanie Rose Bird whose work on folk tales of the African diaspora has been exhibited around the world, Benebell Wen who debuted her fusion of Eastern Buddhist and Daoist occultism with Western occultism in *The Holistic Tarot*, and award-winning authors Devin Hunter and Matt Auryn. Metaphysical publishers Llewellyn and Crossed Crow Books will also be in attendance.

First founded by a small group of local magical practitioners inspired by the example of Pantheacon on the West Coast, the goal of ConVocation has always been to bring magical people of all stripes together for a weekend of community and co-building unlike any other. It's now organized by the Magical Education Council of Ann Arbor, whose President credits Crazy Wisdom's Witch's Night Out with her involvement in the MEC and ConVocation.

"I came to Witch's Night Out," Payne recalled in our interview, "and it was snowing. Very few people showed up. But those of us who did got to talking about ConVocation. I was amazed to hear about these people who were creating a full magical village for four days.

"My first time attending, I was nervous," Payne laughed. "For months we'd been hearing stories and seeing pictures on the convention's Facebook group. Four of us who met through Witch's Night Out attended together. We ended up each agreeing to go to different classes and take notes so we could report back to the others!"

"It was overwhelming in the best way to be out in Troy, Michigan, and have a thousand witches and magical people gathering. There were rituals throughout the day, a vendor's hall, and of course the masquerade ball. Christopher Penzack was there too, and he was one of my favorite authors. It was like a family camp for metaphysical people."

Payne says she left her first ConVocation overwhelmed with gratitude and joy. She and her friends promptly resolved to attend each year, often showing up on Wednesday, before the convention began, in order to "get into con mode."

"Over the years, I found community at ConVocation. I met some of my best friends. And when I was offered the opportunity to get more involved by joining the board, I jumped at it."

One important reason behind ConVocation's choice of new location is the hotel's willingness to accommodate Pagan values. "We told the hotel, 'we can only do business with venues that allow hospitality suites.' These are our community values: we want to be able to feed our community. Nourishment is part of that. The hotel also worked with convention to create an affordable grab-and-go menu, which is much more affordable than standard hotel restaurants and mobile so it can be picked up quickly and taken to classes."

"The children's program is really good. Don't be afraid to bring your kids, because my kids had a blast, and it didn't take away from my husband and I's ability to take our own classes and activities."

— Crystal Thomas, member of Witches of West Michigan

"Accessibility is important to us. That's one reason we're not at a campground; there are many outdoor Pagan festivals, but some people can more easily access and navigate indoor spaces. We also allow volunteers to earn admission with their volunteer hours, so they don't have to pay the ticket price. The children's track allows parents of school-aged children to do their own thing during the day, then pick the kids up for lunch and dinner and attend family-friendly activities at night."

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Crystal Thomas, a member of the Witches of West Michigan, shared with me about her experience attending ConVocation for the first time in 2024. She said that ConVocation's mission of accessibility was successful in allowing her whole family to attend the convention, despite initial anxieties about childcare for her four children.

"I first heard about ConVocation through this social gathering of the Witches of West Michigan," Thomas told me. "I heard that anyone who could go, should go. And I thought, 'Wow, that's a strong recommendation!' Before that I had never been to a convention outside of work conferences, other than the local Pagan Pride."

"When the schedule came out and we began to select our classes, I noticed for the first time that there were classes for all age ranges. Elementary school, teenagers, adults. The classes were advertised for children five and up. Before looking at the class schedule, I had no idea this was a family-friendly and family-encouraged event. So, I got tickets for my four children (aged seven and up) as well."

I asked Thomas what the energy was like when she, her husband, and four children walked into the convention hotel.

"The energy was fun," she told me. "There was always a line at the elevators, but getting into them was a great way to bond with strangers. I made friends in every class I took. Everyone was so warm and inviting. This was the first time I'd ever brought my children to a busy environment like that. I have social anxiety, but never once did I feel a sense of anxiety or worry."

"At opening ceremonies," Thomas told me, "Everybody comes together. There's a lot of energy, a lot of excitement. The organizers really lay out what to expect, where things are. It's very good for people who have never been there and don't know what to expect across the four days. They laid out where resources are, what to do in an emergency, how to get hold of people who could help you if you had a problem or were in distress."

Thomas told me that amid the wide diversity of programming, she took every yoga class and every foraging class that she could.

"The foraging classes by Lucille of Lotions, Potions, and Notions were absolutely amazing. We're friends on Facebook now. My practice resides in nature and in empowering myself to let go of the expectations of the modern world. I prioritize going within myself and listening to my body and the Earth. I'm work-

The Magical Community of ConVocation

ing really hard to ignore society's need for constant activity and change and get back to the heart of being one with this Earth and with myself."

When asked if there was anything new attendees should know, Thomas told me, "My husband and I both agreed that moving forward, we would schedule times for breaks instead of booking ourselves back-to-back for classes. Give yourself time to recharge, because it's so busy, and there's so much energy. It's a fun kind of work that leaves you excited to do it again; but, give yourself time to rest and recharge at some point during the day."

This matches with what attendees of many other conventions have told me: while the programming is amazing, sometimes the real magic happens in the time *between* the organized activities.

"I also want to let people know," Thomas shared, "that the children's program is really good. Don't be afraid to bring your kids, because my kids had a blast, and it didn't take away from my husband and I's ability to take our own classes and activities. ConVocation has a structured program for kids to be educated, entertained, and safe. Afterward, my kids asked, 'Are we gonna do this every year? Because it's amazing.'"

"They participated in the children's ball with its costume contest. They took classes on astrology, learning about the stars, crocheting, and had a fairy tea party. It was amazing for me and my husband, because we could go and take classes on our own or together and not worry about our children being taken care of. If your children need you, they text you immediately, and you are nearby and can easily get to them. It was an amazing setup that felt very safe and inclusive."

I asked Thomas whether her family used some of the features that are new at the Ypsilanti location, such as the Divination Den and the hospitality suite.

"We used the hospitality suite," she told me. "It was great because even though we brought our own food and they did have a warm pay-and-go buffet downstairs, the hospitality suite provided more convenient snack options and drinks. We donated to make it easier for them to afford that next year, because we think it's such an important community resource."

As I spoke with Thomas about her recent first-time attendance experience, I couldn't help but think that the convention's board would be proud of how well ConVocation's mission is succeeding.

Moira Payne shared with me that work has already begun on ConVocation 2026; each convention is 18 months in the making. I asked her if she had any tips for first-time attendees.

"Book your hotel room as soon as possible," she advised me. "They sell out very fast. That's one reason we chose this location: there are other nearby hotels where people can stay when the main hotel becomes booked up. But there's something special about staying at the main hotel, and being fully immersed, seeing what people get up to after hours. We sell out all the rooms in the hotel, so it's a true hotel takeover."

"It's inspiring," Payne told me, "How much there is to know. And how little we already know. There's such a wealth of knowledge here. I really enjoy seeing how other people journey into their spiritual seeking. People fly in from all around the country, even from around the world for this. It's such a joy to see their eyes light up…to hear them talking to like-minded people."

Payne also shared that this year's ConVocation is holding a food drive for Pagans in Need, a network of Pagan-run food pantries with physical locations in Lansing and Kalamazoo. Non-perishable food items will be accepted at ConVocation for donation to Pagans in Need. Pagans in Need's website includes options to donate, volunteer, and submit service requests at any time.

Pagans in Need's mission statement notes that you don't have to be Pagan to receive food from them, but that their program is intended to serve people who might be turned away from other food resources due to their religious orientation. This is something I've seen happen to Michigan Pagans with my own eyes this past year, as many Michigan churches require people to be congregation members in order to receive their food assistance. ConVocation's decision to partner with this charity reflects their commitment to create a safe and inclusive environment for all.

"We get together and have a good time and find a sense of belonging. But what are we gathered around? The connection with the Earth, our footprint that we leave for future generations. It's about the good that can come from connections between life-minded people who are focused on making positive change."
— Moira Payne

As our interview about ConVocation concluded, Payne reflected on that Witch's Night Out at Crazy Wisdom over a decade ago.

"Crazy Wisdom is home to me. I go in there and it's just the smell of home. It's everything good. Witch's Night Out was the beginning of so many things for me. Crazy Wisdom has been so supportive of Witch's Night Out, creating a beautiful space for relationships through which people can connect. I've seen students come in from the nearby university who are just finding themselves, or who are doing academic research on alternative spiritualities. It's all right there for them. And it's such a gift to the local community."

"Everything started with Witch's Night Out for me. And now look at what it has become. As part of the Magical Education Council, as part of the ConVocation Board, I have the opportunity to help build spiritual community for the long-term. We're always imagining ways we can add more services for our community, ways we can do more and be more. And that, of course, attracts more people." Payne laughed. "That's why we need a whole hotel complex now."

"As these events become stronger, our community becomes stronger. And then we can do more for the world. I remember once, I was taking my son to the grocery store, and a woman saw the bumper sticker on my car about me being a witch. She frowned and asked my son, 'Is your mommy really a witch? Does she curse people?'

"No!" My son exclaimed. "My mommy heals the world."

"To me, that ultimately is what this is all about. We get together and have a good time and find a sense of belonging. But what are we gathered around? The connection with the Earth, our footprint that we leave for future generations. It's about the good that can come from connections between life-minded people who are focused on making positive change."

Those interested in attending ConVocation 2025 can find the registration button and hotel information at ConVocation.org/home. You'll also see a menu of links to more information about the event's many features on the left-hand side of the website. The Facebook page, Facebook.com/ConVocationMichigan also posts regular updates about the event and can be used to meet and discuss with others who are planning to attend this year.

If Pagans in Need's mission calls to you, Pagans in Need posts regular updates on their activities and welcomes community members to subscribe to make small monthly donations on their Patreon, Patreon.com/PagansinNeed. Service requests can be submitted and information about volunteering can be found at PagansinNeed.org.

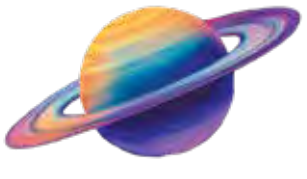
Astrologically Speaking

THE SATURN RETURN

By Catherine Carlson

The next time you talk to one of your parents or grandparents, ask them what happened to them between the ages of 28 and 30. I guarantee they will tell you about an important event in their life. If you have already reached your thirties or beyond, then you also have a story to tell—that of your Saturn Return.

Saturn's cycle of approximately 29.5 years means about every thirty years it will return to the exact same place it was when you were born. During our lifetime, we may experience a Saturn Return between the ages of 28 to 30, ages 58 to 60, and again between 88 and 90. Saturn Returns are really passages in life—three significant transitions that we may experience.



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Saturn is known as the god of time and the lord of karma, or as a teacher of mine liked to call it, the school principal who is checking to see if you are doing your homework. The Saturn Return presents us with a job that we cannot say no to. It's a tough task master and requires us to work at something. Saturn is a planet that shows us how, and in what context, we are going to learn our lessons.

Age 28-30:

The *first* Saturn Return is a significant event which grows you up in some fashion. It is marked by common initiations including a change in location, the purchase of a first home, a big relationship change, marriage, career advancement, or the birth of a child. The hallmark of these events happening *at this particular age* is that the experience will come with challenges, often unexpected, and we are forced to face them. Before the first Saturn Return, we are still a child in many ways and afterward we have entered adulthood and begun to experience who we are becoming through a uniquely personal taste of the real world.

In her book *Midlife is Not a Crisis*, Virginia Bell says for most of us "the Saturn Return is a challenging but empowering period. By committing to something and following through, we learn discipline, decision making, and how to function in the world." The period of adjustment that follows the events of your own Saturn return time period can feel like an uphill climb. When I was 29, I moved across the country and went back to school. In my mind this seemed like a natural next step and fun adventure. The reality was it was a steep learning curve including changes to the plan. Looking back, I am able to see how my lessons were unavoidable and how they formed my life path.

The *first* Saturn Return is a significant event which grows you up in some fashion… The hallmark of these events happening *at this particular age* is that the experience will come with challenges, often unexpected, and we are forced to face them.

During Taylor Swift's Saturn Return she broke out of her comfort zone and released her album *Reputation*, influenced by difficult experiences, which sold over one million copies in its first week. This followed in 2018 with four awards at the American Music Awards making her their most awarded female musician. But the really exceptional Saturnian play she made, after much strife, was to sign a deal with a new record group. Her new contract stipulated that Swift had copyright ownership on her music moving forward—an unprecedented move in the industry.

Many people between ages 28 and 30 have their first child. Astrology folks call these kids Saturn babies—perfectly wonderful children! It is the parent-child relationship where Saturn's energy shows up and requires more effort for both parent and child to find a balance—part of the life lessons for each.

Age 58-60:

Saturn represents the archetypal father looking over your shoulder seeing if you are on task. We would all like to hear, "You're doing a good job!" If the first Saturn return sets the stage for your lessons, the *second* Saturn return is the harvest. Since you were in your late twenties, life has shaped you. This second time you cross over into senior status, and with your wisdom, you are now able to help others in an authentic way.

This is the age when people often retire. Perhaps you are able to take decades of effort and turn it into something new career-wise, or finally buy a vacation property. If you have been doing your due diligence, this is a time when you can reap rewards and experience success. In 2022, at age 59, veteran actor Michelle Yeoh starred in the movie *Everything, Everywhere, all at Once* and earned her first Oscar for that role honoring her perseverance. Sometimes Saturn returns have a pattern. One couple I know had a son during the first Saturn Return and that son gave them their first grandchild, also a boy, during their second Saturn return.

If the first Saturn return sets the stage for your lessons, the *second* Saturn return is the harvest.

Age 88-90:

Saturn three-peat. The first Saturn return catapults you into adulthood and the second is the return on your investment. The *third* Saturn Return refines our maturity even more and highlights our limitations. At the age of the third Saturn Return we are not building from the ground up as we did in our 20s and 30s, and many have long since retired. Being set in our ways is the challenge, yet we may still have a new experience that forces us into a new mold. This may be the time when you make your final move to live with your children or to a community. You may become a great-grandparent or receive significant recognition from a lifetime of work. His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, currently in his third Saturn Return, underwent knee replacement surgery last June at age 88. It was a big change requiring time and effort to heal but was also a renewal.

The good news is, because Saturn is known as the timekeeper, as we age, things tend to get easier. The high road of these turning points illuminates our mastery and teaching ability; the more difficult side can present challenges that require us to find our strength and courage such as through a loss. Saturn encourages us to adapt to circumstances, and face our tests, knowing we will come out on the other side with a greater understanding and better equipped for whatever lies ahead.

Catherine Carlson is an Astrologer who offers consultations for adults and children. She is an Ann Arbor native who enjoys living locally with her family. She can be reached at catherine-carlson.com or catenka@mac.com.

YOGA COLUMN

Namaste, Katie...

Whether you're a seasoned yogi or getting ready to roll out your mat for the first time, here you'll find a variety of useful tips from local yoga instructor, Katie Hoener.

Katie Hoener is a RYT 500, receiving her 200 and 500 hour trainings. She is also a Licensed Master Social Worker and a partner at Verapose Yoga in Dexter (veraposeyoga.com). Please send your own yoga questions to katie@veraposeyoga.com.

Dear Katie,
I am not sure if it is a hybrid work schedule, or a recent new workout routine I have been trying, but the sides of my body have been so sore. My partner said it is my "lats" and I am not sure if it's that, or something a bit lower that feels tight all the time. Any suggestions for something I can do on the job to stay relaxed.
Thanks,
Rob, Ann Arbor

Namaste Rob,
There are so many things that we do that can activate the sides of our bodies, whether it is a workout, household activities, or working in different environments. Our Latissimus Dorsi is a large muscle that covers part of the upper back, wraps around the side, and into the abdominals. The 'lats' as we often shorten the muscle group, are surface level, and get involved in many activities!

Many yoga asanas target the lats and are referred to as lateral bends. One such asana is called Blown Palm. In this asana, which we can take seated or standing, we ground through our lower half and move from the waist up. Inhale as the arms reach up, lengthening the spine to a degree that feels good. We want to offer a sense of reach without forcing. Utilize the inhale for the lift, and the exhale for a reach of the top arm over and up. Our aim here, whether we are seated or standing, is to offer space to the side body.

In some versions of this posture, we move to one side and hold for a few breaths, and then switch sides. In other practices, or on days with different needs, we may inhale the arms toward the sky and exhale reach to one side, using the next inhale to lift us back to center. Whether we are choosing a hold or a flow, we want to make sure that we don't feel any crunching in the waist as we move from side to side, continuing to stay mindful of lifting through the body.

Namaste Katie,
I am a Kapha and find the winters exceptionally challenging when it comes to getting up and moving around. Since yoga is so connected to Ayurveda, is there any particular practice that can assist me in some get up and go?
Nina, Dexter

Dear Nina,
Winter in Michigan can be challenging for many of us! Add a Kapha Dosha type to that, and it can make things more challenging. To back up just a bit, Ayurveda is the sister science of Yoga and is considered the "Science of Life." Within this beautiful practice that looks at various aspects of our lives, there are three main constitutions that are explored called the Doshas. Vata is the Dosha that consists of air and space, Pitta consists of fire and water, and Kapha consists of earth and water. According to the Ayurvedic clock, winter is also a Kaphic time, when we see some animals hibernate, certain plants lose their leaves, and generally life slows a bit to match the pace of the season. For those of us who also land more in the Kaphic space in our own make-up, we can feel the effects of that slow down more acutely.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, to counter this tendency to slow down, we add warmth and heat to our bodies, through warm showers, dry brushing, cinnamon teas, and the like. We can carry this idea into out asana practices as well. Flow classes are a nice way to add a moderate amount of heat and jump start a practice. Studios that offer a slow flow may be what you are looking for.

There is often a tendency to jump straight to a Vinyasa or Ashtanga session, and for most Kapha, this is too much heat. Dosha work is all about bringing the body into balance, not trying to push too hard. Find those spaces that get you moving while bringing you enjoyment.

Namaste Katie,
I recently took a compassion workshop at work over a lunch hour. They had some amazing exercises for the office, such as gratitude journaling, and writing emails of thanks to co-workers that are pointed and specific. Are there ways to translate some of these ideas to my meditation practice?
Marcus, Ann Arbor

Dear Marcus,
What a lovely option to bring to the office. Compassion practices can be shifted to practices of self-compassion. Dr. Kristin Neff is the lead researcher on self-compassion, and has published books and workbooks on mindful self-compassion which outlines practices for ourselves and our communities. Self-compassion as defined by Neff is composed of self-love, mindfulness, and common humanity which sounds like your workshop started to touch on.

Utilize the inhale for the lift, and the exhale for a reach of the top arm over and up. Our aim here, whether we are seated or standing, is to offer space to the side body.

Related to the exercise of writing thank-you's to your colleagues is the self-compassion exercise called: How would you treat a friend? In this exercise, which is often done as a meditation, envision the language you use to speak to those you care about. If a friend came to you hurting, how are you tending to them? How are you holding space for them? What are the words you are using? Spend a few minutes pulling into focus not only words, but also how they feel. What are you trying to convey?

Once you have developed a comprehensive message with words, but the feeling tone as well, turn the message and the sensation, toward yourself. Become that friend. Look at yourself as worthy of the words you carefully crafted as well as the tone and feeling. After you have flipped the message, sit with the feeling and the message for as long as you have available, or as long as it feels good.

Boost Your Winter Immunity with Plant-Based Foods

SUSTAINABLE HEALTH

By Lisa Viger-Gotte

As the cold winter season approaches, ensuring a healthy, responsive, and robust immune system becomes even more important. Freezing weather, short days, and reduced sunlight can put stress on our bodies and increase our chances of getting sick. A plant-based diet, full of immune-boosting antioxidants and nutrients that naturally fight inflammation and promote immune response, is an excellent way to make sure you and your family stay as healthy as possible this winter.

How Nutrition Influences Immune Health

Our immune system is a complex, coordinated network of organs, tissues, and cells. These complex parts work together to defend our bodies against harmful invaders. This defensive network identifies potential threats, such as viruses, bacteria, and other pathogens, and actively works to eliminate them. Proper nutrition is essential for keeping this system functioning efficiently and at its best. A diet rich in nutrient-dense foods provides vitamins, minerals, and other essentials that supports immune function and enhances the overall effectiveness and resilience of the immune system.

Which Nutrients Support the Immune System?

Vitamin C is a well-known antioxidant that acts as a boost for the immune system. Many of us have heard the advice to “drink some orange juice” when feeling unwell, and there’s a lot of truth to it. Vitamin C promotes the production of white blood cells which are crucial in fighting infections. You can find Vitamin C in citrus fruits and various vegetables such as broccoli and bell peppers. Eating a couple delicious clementines or oranges every day can give you more than enough Vitamin C.

Vitamin A plays a key role in maintaining the health of our skin and mucous membranes which serve as our first line of defense against invaders. It’s important to ensure you get enough of this nutrient particularly in the form of beta-carotene found in orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes, and also leafy greens. A salad with sliced carrots or a tasty bowl of sweet potato soup can provide a good dose of Vitamin A.

Vitamin D is actually a hormone, not just a vitamin, and it’s well-known for its connection to sun exposure. In northern climates, sunlight can be scarce during the winter months. To help maintain sufficient vitamin D levels, consider incorporating mushrooms, fortified plant milks, and supplements into your diet, especially when the days are shorter. In addition to fortified plant milks, a daily supplement will ensure you get enough Vitamin D.

Vitamin E acts as a fat-soluble antioxidant playing a crucial role in protecting cells from oxidative stress and aiding in the production of immune cells. You can find plenty of vitamin E in nuts, seeds, and green leafy vegetables such as spinach and kale. A smoothie with spinach and kale added is a delicious way to get Vitamin E.

Zinc is another important mineral that supports the function and signaling of immune cells; a deficiency in zinc can weaken the immune response. Good plant-based sources of zinc include legumes, seeds, nuts, and whole grains. Hummus, bean chilis, and whole grains like brown rice, amaranth, and quinoa are going to provide lots of zinc.

Iron is essential for hemoglobin production and also contributes to the growth and maturation of immune cells. Plant-based sources rich in iron include lentils, chickpeas, tofu, quinoa, and dark leafy greens. To enhance iron absorption, pair these foods with those high in vitamin C. A spinach salad with oranges and quinoa would be tasty!

Fiber and prebiotics are also important. Foods high in fiber, like whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, help maintain a healthy gut microbiome which is closely linked to immune health. Prebiotics, found in garlic, onions, leeks, and bananas nourish beneficial gut bacteria supporting a balanced immune response.

Antioxidants and phytochemicals are abundant in many plant-based foods. These compounds help reduce inflammation and protect against cellular damage. Berries, dark leafy greens, nuts, seeds, and spices like turmeric and ginger are excellent sources of these health-promoting compounds. Dark chocolate is also packed with antioxidants. Cocoa powder can be added to smoothies for a delicious shake.

How Plant-Based Foods Bolster the Immune System

- Reducing Inflammation: Chronic inflammation can compromise the immune system making the body more vulnerable to illness. Many plant-based foods possess anti-inflammatory properties that can help mitigate inflammation and enhance overall immune health. For instance, leafy greens like spinach and kale are packed with antioxidants and phytochemicals that fight inflammation.
- Enhancing Gut Health: A healthy gut plays a vital role in maintaining a strong immune system as a large part of the immune system is located in the gut. Foods that are high in fiber and prebiotics, only found in plant-based foods, help foster a healthy gut microbiome which in turn supports immune function. Fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, and plant-based yogurts provide beneficial probiotics that further enhance gut health.
- Providing Essential Nutrients: Plant-based foods are abundant in essential vitamins and minerals that bolster the immune system. For instance, citrus fruits and bell peppers are excellent sources of vitamin C while nuts and seeds are loaded with vitamin E. Eating a diverse range of plant-based foods ensures that the body gets a wide array of nutrients necessary for optimal immune performance.
- Supporting Detoxification: Numerous plant-based foods, including cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts, aid the body’s natural detoxification processes. A well-functioning detox system is crucial for removing toxins that could hinder immune function.

Practical Tips for Incorporating Immune-Boosting Plant-Based Foods

Start Your Day with a Nutrient-Dense Smoothie: Blend together spinach, kale, a handful of berries, a banana, and some flaxseeds or chia seeds with a plant-based milk such as almond or oat milk. This smoothie is packed with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber to give your immune system a great start.

Incorporate Leafy Greens into Every Meal: Make it a habit to add a side salad with dark leafy greens to your lunch and dinner. You can also mix greens into soups, stews, and stir-fries for an additional nutrient boost.

Snack on Nuts and Seeds: Keep a selection of nuts and seeds available for a quick, nutrient-rich snack. Almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, and pumpkin seeds are all excellent sources of immune-supporting nutrients like vitamin E, zinc, and healthy fats.

Prepare Hearty Soups and Stews: Soups and stews are ideal for including a variety of vegetables and legumes, which are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Consider making a large batch of lentil soup or minestrone.

Experiment with Fermented Foods: Try adding fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kimchi, or plant-based yogurt to your meals. These foods are rich in beneficial probiotics that help maintain a healthy gut microbiome crucial for a strong immune system.

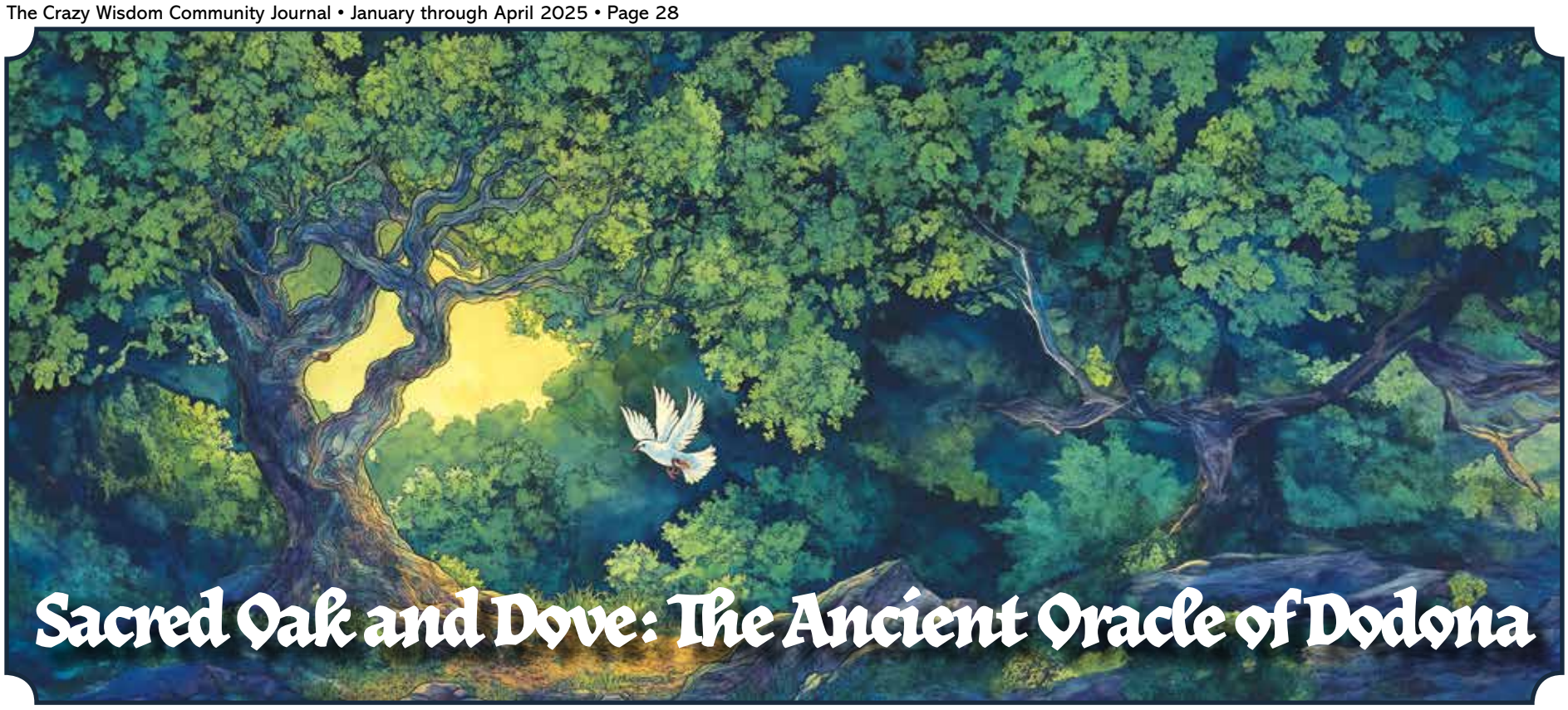
Spice Up Your Meals: Use immune-boosting spices like turmeric, ginger, garlic, and cayenne pepper in your cooking. Not only do these spices enhance the flavor of your dishes, but they also possess anti-inflammatory and antioxidant benefits.

Enjoy Citrus Fruits Daily: Make it a habit to snack on oranges, grapefruits, or mandarins, or squeeze some lemon juice into your water. These fruits are packed with vitamin C vital for the production of white blood cells whichh is an essential part of the immune system.

Stay Hydrated: It’s important to drink plenty of water for overall health including immune support. Staying well-hydrated aids in nutrient transport throughout the body and helps with detoxification.

Supporting your immune system during the winter months is crucial for staying healthy and avoiding illness. A plant-based diet filled with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and anti-inflammatory compounds can provide the essential support needed for a robust immune system. By including a diverse range of nutrient-dense plant-based foods in your meals, you can boost your immune function and enjoy a healthier, more vibrant winter season.

Lisa Viger Gotte is a vegan artist, photographer, author, Vegan Life Coach Educator, and RYT 200 yoga teacher. She shows others how simple and delicious a plant-based diet can be at Planted365.com.



Sacred Oak and Dove: The Ancient Oracle of Dodona

By Dianna Rhyan

> From distant Dodona sojourners come back bearing oracles:
> omens of wise bird-sayings.
> *(Hesiodic Catalogue)*

Far away in the mists of ancient days, there once dwelt a band of extraordinary trees with the gift of prophecy: oaks with the power of human speech, answering the needs of mortals who journeyed far to seek their wise counsel. This sounds like a folk tale, but it is not. Deeply rooted in archaic Greek myth, these oaks also lived in history as the first and only oracle existing in Greece for many years. Ancient mythographers remembered the priestesses who tended these oaks as the first females on earth who ever sang their own compositions; their companion nymphs were compassionate nurses for Zeus, shielding him in his vulnerable infancy, and henceforth revealing his will to mortals. In the remote and mountainous terrain of Epirus in northwest Greece, from the second millennium BCE, this sacred forest grew in the mystical sanctuary of Dodona.

> There once was a vast grove,
> fair and goddess-beloved,
> spreading far and wide, thickly forested,
> abundant with trees.
> Inside grew lofty pines, mighty elms, and stately oaks,
> fertile wild pears, and blushing sweet apples.
> Here flowed rivulets, streams shining bright.
> *(Callimachus, Hymn to Demeter)*

Imagine the scene: divinities gather here, fair as the trees. Nature spirits move among them. Under flickering leaves, immortals offer the refreshment of pure water and the abundance of tender fruit, drawing us closer toward the elemental.

As the Roman naturalist Pliny the Elder understood,

> Trees were considered sacred precincts and temples of forest divinities in primordial times. Even today, country folk, preserving simpler, purer, and older rituals, will consecrate their most majestic tree to a goddess or god.…We are still struck with adoration and awe by a glade of trees, a sacred grove veiled in utter silence.
> *(Natural History)*

The majestic oaks of Dodona were primordial and did inspire awe, yet they did not stand veiled in silence. On the contrary, they spoke in divination. Archaeologists have unearthed and deciphered travelers' questions and the oracle's answers, in the form of messages incised on strips of lead. Sometimes the case was desperate and the journey remote. Whether seekers asked about fruitful crops, freedom from slavery, childbearing, unsolved mysteries, or safe emigration, the oaks answered offering resolution in their replies.

Ancient myths remember such encounters. The hero Achilles prayed to Zeus of the oak grove through the mediation of unusual priests:

> Zeus, lord of Dodona, living in faraway land,
> you keep watch over the sacred precinct where your priests reside,
> living among the oaks and sleeping on the ground with feet unwashed.
> Hear me.
> *(Iliad)*

These priests were barefoot mountain dwellers who slept unsheltered amongst the trees dreaming in conscious contact with the ground. Their practices suggest spiritual union with the oaks' chthonic power rooted deep inside the earth. They lived humbly, and why not? Surely oaks are unpretentious votaries to grand officials. Likewise, some said the priestesses of the sanctuary lived inside the hollow of an oak, or even in a stump, suggesting enormous, wizened trees as shrines or habitations. An ancient truth is afoot here: unassuming wayfarers who shied away from thronged, wealthy temples entered tranquil groves for simpler, rustic, hushed communion with the divine.

The archetypal traveler Odysseus was rumored to seek out this oracle on his far-flung wanderings when he consulted an oak that spoke with countless leafy tongues:

> The hero has journeyed to Dodona, to hear the prophecy of Zeus,
> the voice of the holy oak whose tongues are a thousand leaves.
> He seeks to learn how he could manage to return home,
> having been away, assumed dead, for too many dangerous years.
> *(Odyssey)*

When the exiled heroine Io roamed the world as a cow-maiden, the trees helped her make sense of her experience.

> Maiden, you have wandered and endured as far as steep Dodona,
> where grows the oracular grove of Zeus.
> There the oaks endowed with human voice,
> a portent beyond hope,
> in clear and certain speech, no riddling words,
> hailed you as a destined consort of Zeus.
> *(Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound)*

Even Herakles, paragon of might, submitted to their prophetic guidance:

> The final completion to the labors of Herakles,
> crafted by the gods, he heard for himself at Dodona:
> the ancient oak of many tongues and many voices
> foretold his fate, speaking through the oak priestesses,
> in the form of twin doves of the wood.
> *(Sophocles, Women of Trachis)*

What did Odysseus, Io, Herakles, and other supplicants hear? An oak spirit sighing in archaic boughs, fluttering birds concealed in rustling leaves, or murmured syllables from mystic priestesses? Essences mingle to express archaic powers mingling on the sacred site. **The oak-dwelling doves especially draw attention here, for they represent the epiphany of the primeval Earth goddess in bird form.** She loved to swoop free in flight and relished bird epiphanies. She was a winged traveler to the limits of the ocean, mother of monsters, bringer of youthful blossoming, bearer of the day of doom, and mistress of fecund animals. Bird imagery is intuitive; it cannot be grasped. Her bird and tree forms invite us to reflect on the doves of Dodona, as they nestled in deep-leaved, deep-bosomed holy oaks.

For supplicants in need, to seek prophetic ritual from afar was a sacred journey: a pilgrimage undertaken in search of spiritual insight. Could an archaic oracle be a guide for our own footsteps in search of oak wisdom or dove intuition?

Travelers did not find Dodona only in myth. The historian Herodotus wrote a description of his ancient journey to Dodona in search of prophetic oaks and doves. His eyewitness account brings to life the priestesses who walked the whispering sanctuary, for he met the grove dwellers in person, and they spoke to him there. To him, the priestesses carefully imparted the fruits of their own tradition:

> The prophetesses of Dodona say there were two black doves who flew from Thebes in Egypt…and one arrived among the priestesses in Dodona, seating herself upon an oak tree. She pronounced in a human voice that in this very place, an oracle of Zeus was to arise. Those who heard her comprehended that this was a divine message, and they carried out what the dove proclaimed. The priestesses of Dodona told me this account…and the women who led the way in prophecy and served the sacred grove were called Doves."
> *(Herodotus, Histories)*

Here dwelt wise women, whose lives call to mind an ancient tombstone:

> In life I was a priestess of Demeter,
> in time an old woman, and now I am dust.
> I guided many young priestesses
> through passage to new womanhood.
> Traveler, farewell.
> *(Palatine Anthology)*

From childhood, women worshiped in such enclosures, entering at propitious times to leave votive statuettes, clothing, textiles, or dolls as offerings to tree-clad goddesses and nymphs. Some played prominent roles in ritual here, noble maidens privileged to serve the local cult. As votary to the grove, ever more confident as seasons slipped by, a young girl may have followed and then ventured to lead the maiden chorus of song and dance.

Picture them in the greenwood: a group of worshippers who share in sacred rites, to delight their deity. They have gathered to dance, feast, drink, sing, sacrifice, pray, or lament, taking strength in rituals by moonlight or sunlight. Social and spiritual bonds formed inside sanctuaries had power outside its boundaries, especially for women, whose lives were meant to be subdued. Ceremonial ties enriched daily life near hearths, looms, wells, bridal chambers, and childbirth beds. In sacred groves, their devotion honored the life cycles of vegetation so very like our own.

The oak grove embraced them in their circling seasons.

As a chorus of nymphs sense each other's steps in a dance, trees live out the fertile plurality of shared life. Sit in any forest and see how all things move together in the spiral dance of life and death. Mutual care flows, with reciprocal seasons for leaf, root, twig, stump. Trees at the edge of the forest are strong in a different way from those within; they have grown together, aware of one another's needs. The row of old white pines reflected in the pond link hands underground, brushing in breezes above, swaying in wave patterns dear to themselves, alive in each other's knowing. Let footsteps here be soft and chosen with care.

In the beginning, around the Mediterranean Sea and far beyond, inside tree sanctuaries there stood no monumental buildings of stone, no declarative tablets carved in bronze, no sacrifices of a hundred bellowing oxen. Living water from a pure spring, however, was essential to cleanse all who would enter. **In Dodona, she was a sentient and prophetic stream named Dione Naia, an immortal consort of Zeus, whose speaking waters surged up from oak roots, adding her liquid tones to the doves cooing in the branches above.** Though many sites acquired formal shrines over time, the true spirit of the place was never encased by foundations or roofed by any structure. When marble columns did arrive, they protected the site including its sacred spring and reflected the stately tree goddess, observing all who approached.

Many goddesses dwelt in tree form, including Demeter, Artemis, Hera, Aphrodite, and countless vegetation divinities whose names are no longer known.

She might be addressed as Divine Mistress, She Who Is Holy, or Very Holy One when awestruck worshippers spoke to her. And vivified by the spirit of her dryad, she herself divined the truth, and spoke it.

> There once was a sacred grove of Demeter,
> and in the very center stood a statuesque oak,
> a goddess grown centuries green.
> She was the divine protectress of all life within the region.
>
> …
>
> Often in her shade dryads led their festive dances.
> Linking slender wrists,
> dancing nymphs would circle her mighty trunk.
> Ancestral to all the trees surrounding,
> her shade gently wafted down, just as
> the dryads' shadows over the soft green grass
> moved tenderly on bare feet.
> *(Ovid, Metamorphoses; Callimachus, Hymn to Demeter)*

When we pause here on the soft grass to look up at the garlanded oak, wreathed and encircled by worshippers, are we beholding the oak, the tree goddess, or the tree's psyche, her tree-nymph-soul, her dryad? It is impossible to say. Leafy boughs and swaying spirits move gently together in the breeze and exist on a continuum with each other.

A dryad or tree nymph, the embodiment of her tree's life energy, the responsive life force of the heartwood, was united with the tree she ensouled. Woven into the fabric of the tree's life, her psyche mingled with the tree's materiality. This is how the oaks of Dodona spoke in human tones.

> When lofty firs and stately oaks spring up from holy ground,
> their nymphs are born in that very same hour,
> and together they flourish on the breast of abundant Earth,
> lifting their graceful arms to the heavens.
> *(Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite)*

When the priestesses of Dodona interpreted divine will, their windswept oracles resounded through majestic oaks, shimmering water, fluttering doves, and nymphs. In Dodona's shapeshifting tradition of flowing divination, where trees were dryads and priestesses were doves, those who revealed immortal wisdom spoke as diviners entranced:

> In a state of prophetic ecstasy, not in their ordinary minds,
> the prophetesses of Dodona wrought wonders.
> *(Plato, Phaedrus)*

When divine ecstasy departed, so did their prophetic gift; afterward, Plato says, they did not necessarily remember what they had imparted. The message had flowed, or flown, through them leafy, liquid, or winged.

Perhaps the intuitive gift of prophecy was first discovered, or granted to mortal hearing because of simple, heartfelt kindnesses performed in some forest grove, when a devotee offered a drink of crystal-clear water to a thirsty sapling, or submerged a cherished offering in a rippling stream, or tucked a precious keepsake between intelligent gnarled roots. Gifts to delight the nymphs, dear and mossy gifts from distant days.

Yet into legend, and into history, tragedy was to come. Emperors stooped to despoil sacred groves, spurning primeval mythic wisdom about sacred trees:

> No mortal must ever approach them with iron.
> *(Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite)*

The oracle of Dodona survived until the late fourth century CE. Then the sanctuary fell to ruin in the face of changing beliefs, devastation of shrines, disbandment of priesthoods, and spreading desolation of polytheistic religious communities. By imperial order, the sacred precinct was destroyed, the speaking spring abandoned.

Every single oak was felled.

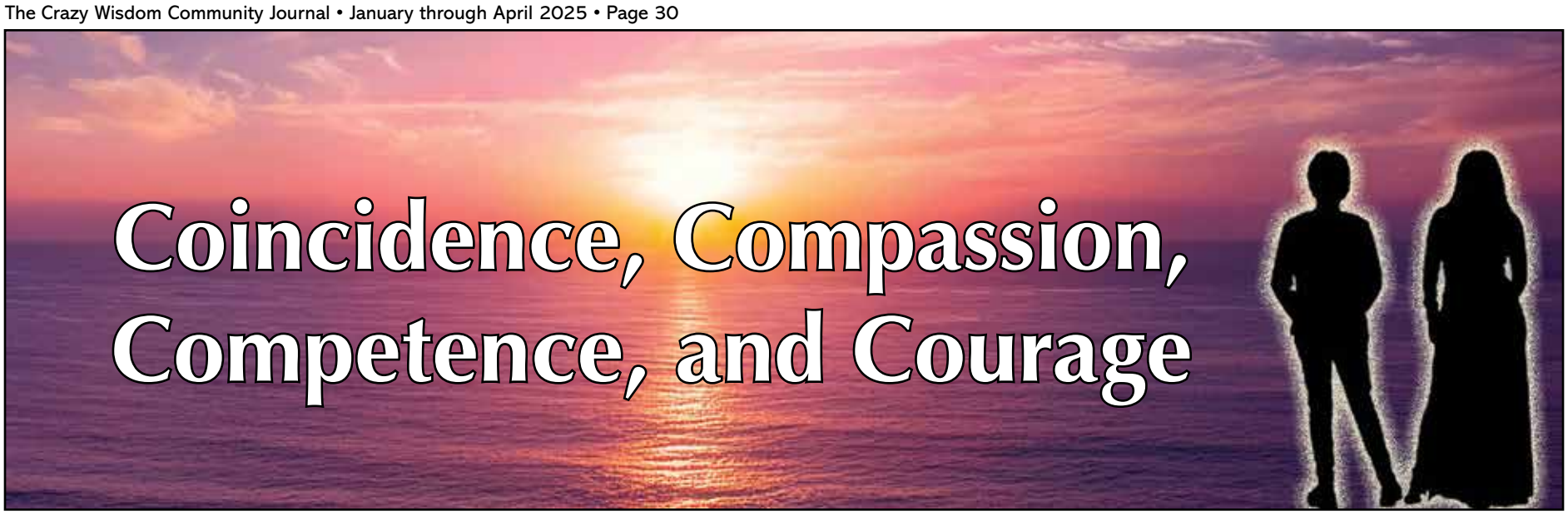
Woven together, history, archaeology, cult, imagination, and myth remember Dodona as a forest sanctuary where worship lasted for thousands of years among the whispering trees, reminding us that such places are both imaginary and real.

> I, a clear-speaking prophetess,
> am hidden beneath a stone monument in this sacred grove.
> Once a maiden of gifted voice, now forever voiceless,
> shackled by the fetter of hard fate.
> Yet I lie here close to honored images of the nymphs,
> whose water runs down into their fountain,
> and beside the statue of the grotto god, memorial in stone.
> By divine grace, I retain below a measure of the sovereignty I held in life.
> *(Pausanias, History of Greece)*

In forest shrines where we once walked, leaf canopies arched to cool the spirit, gentle moss cradled bare feet, and all around us spoke the trees, branching question marks in the wind, grounding answers below. Every forest is such a shrine.

Today on the site of Dodona, shadowing the sanctuary ruins, a few younger oak descendants stand. Rustling leaves in thought, sheltering cooing doves, and drinking deep of hidden waters, they remind us that all oaks are sacred, and all remain keepers of wisdom, still unfolding their murmured conversation with the winds of long, slow, time.

This contemplation of Dodona is based on a chapter of Dianna Rhyan's new book Mestra the Shapeshifter: Ancient Heroine of the Sacred Grove*, from Moon Books. Rhyan is a mythologist and therapist who studies nature goddesses, submerged voices, and the spirituality of sacred landscapes. She has a PhD in Ancient Greek and Latin, taught college for thirty years, and worked on archaeological excavations in Greece and Cyprus. She loves the green spaces of Ann Arbor, is working on her Sumerian, and is the author of* Staff of Laurel, Staff of Ash: Sacred Landscape in Ancient Nature Myth*, also from Moon Books. Visit her online at staffoflaurel.com or email her at staffoflaurel@gmail.com.*



Coincidence, Compassion, Competence, and Courage

By Sandor Slomovits

Some years ago, I read about a study which concluded that one of the main factors in instances of heroic action is a feeling of competence. In other words, the man or woman who runs into rough surf to rescue a struggling swimmer or jumps into an icy lake to pull out a child who has fallen through the ice acts partly out of a sense of confidence about their ability to swim. There are, of course, additional factors. There is the essential one, even if merely accidental or coincidental, of being in the right place at the right time. But, even more important, is having a strong capacity for compassion, and for courage, the ability to set aside fear and act, despite danger and risk.

In other words, the man or woman who runs into rough surf to rescue a struggling swimmer or jumps into an icy lake to pull out a child who has fallen through the ice acts partly out of a sense of confidence about their ability to swim.

Heroism comes in all shades of valor, and every type exemplifies these factors and likely others. Examples abound: the soldier who braves enemy fire to rescue a wounded friend, the whistleblower who risks her career to expose unsafe working conditions, the fireman who enters a burning building, the policewoman who engages an active shooter, the teenaged girl who speaks up when she sees her friend's bruises, the fourth grader who intervenes to stop a class bully….

Two recent obituaries in the news especially caught my eye because they centered on their subjects' compassion, competence, and courage, but also because I felt a particularly personal connection to their stories.

Peter Buxtun died in May at the age of 86. His moment of glory came over fifty years ago when, as an epidemiologist working for the U.S. Public Health Service, he leaked documents exposing the Tuskegee Syphilis Study to Jean Heller, a journalist at *The Washington Post*. (*The Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male* was conducted, from 1932 to 1972, by the U.S. Public Health Service and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. The study monitored the progression of syphilis in hundreds of Black men who were left untreated even after the advent of penicillin.) Shortly after Buxtun began working for the PHS, he tried several times to shut down the blatantly immoral study by reporting it to his superiors, but they repeatedly disregarded his concerns. After trying to work through appropriate internal channels at the Public Health Service, Buxtun finally risked his career and reputation and went to the media to end the study and secure justice for the participants.

Whistleblower
Peter Buxtun

Buxtun's persistence was likely spurred by all the factors leading to heroic actions that I listed above, and perhaps a unique additional one. There was something in his past that impelled him to act.

Born in 1937 to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother in the Czech Republic, Buxtun's family emigrated to the US before WWII due to rising Nazi antisemitism. Growing up, Buxtun frequently heard tales about the Holocaust from family members. So, when he came across the details of the profoundly unethical and depraved Tuskegee study, Buxtun was immediately reminded of the barbaric medical experiments Nazi doctors performed on Jews and other people in concentration camps. "I didn't want to believe it. This was the U.S. Public Health Service. We didn't do things like that."

I understand Buxtun's reaction. Although I have never been tested like Buxtun, like him, I too view the world through lens focused and tinted by the Holocaust experiences of my parents and other family members. His story reminded me of one my mother told me.

On December 4, 1944, her 26th birthday, my mother, Blanka, along with her older sister, Anci, and hundreds of other Jews were marched at gunpoint from the Budapest ghetto in which they had been forced to live for the previous few months. The long line of people snaked along Budapest streets toward the railroad station. My mother, noticing that they were being relatively lightly guarded, mostly by Nyilas thugs (Hungarian fascists assisting the Nazis), began suggesting to her sister that they sneak out of the line, duck into a doorway, and then make their way to her mother-in-law to be, who was herself hiding in a nearby house. Anci balked, "No, they'll see us and shoot us." My mother could not abandon her sister, which is how they, along with hundreds of other Jewish women, came to be shoved into cattle cars and shipped to Germany.

After a horrendous six-day trip, they arrived in the Ravensbrück concentration camp on December 10. The winter of 1944-45 was an especially harsh one in Europe. (In Budapest, the Danube froze over for the first time in decades.) The inmates of Ravensbrück, all women, many of them housed only in large tents, suffered terribly. Perhaps chief among their many miseries were the daily appells, the roll calls: the women were forced to stand outside on the appellplatz in flimsy clothes in bitter December weather while the Nazis counted them. The guards strutted in their tall black leather boots, the women stood in the huge wooden shoes they'd been issued. Their feet were always blistered and bleeding. If, after one count the numbers were not right, the guards would count again—and again.

After trying to work through appropriate internal channels at the Public Health Service, Buxtun finally risked his career and reputation and went to the media to end the study and secure justice for the participants.

There were also the daily selections. After the appells, lines of women were sent to various kinds of labor. At times—they never knew when—some lines would disappear. My mother and her sister tried to always stay together, but one day in mid-January, they were sorted into different lines. My mother hissed to her sister, Anci, "Come here! With me!" Anci stood frozen, "No. They'll shoot me." It was—as they well knew from their month in Ravensbrück—not an unfounded fear. Despite that, my mother was no longer willing to ignore her instincts the way she had in Budapest. She grabbed Anci's arm and yanked her into her own line. That group, 700 women in total, were shipped, again in cattle cars, to Penig, to labor in an airplane parts factory for the remainder of the war.

Penig, a small town near Leipzig, and the site of one of the subcamps of Buchenwald was worlds away from heaven on earth—to put it mildly—but, nevertheless, was still a few degrees less hellish than Ravensbrück. My mother's quick, courageous action may have saved both their lives. They managed to stay together for the rest of the war and made it back to Budapest in July of 1945.

The other obituary that got my attention recently was that of Dr. J. Robin Warren, who died in July at the age of 87. Dr. Warren was an Australian pathologist who in 2005, along with his colleague, Dr. Barry Marshall, received the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discovering that stomach ulcers were caused by the bacterium Helicobacter pylori and not—as had long been believed—stress, alcohol, or spicy foods. Drs. Warren and Marshall's work gave the lie to centuries of accepted wisdom about the cause of ulcers. "The standard teaching in medicine

was that the stomach was sterile, and nothing grew there because of corrosive gastric juices," Dr. Warren said years later. "So, everybody believed there were no bacteria in the stomach. When I said they were there, no one believed it."

I was particularly drawn to Dr. Warren's story because of my own long history with stomach ulcers. I began struggling with ulcers in 1966 just before I turned eighteen. At the time, I was given the same advice and treatment as all patients. I was told to chug bottles of Gelusil, drink lots of milk (turns out, exactly the wrong thing to do), abstain from spicy foods and alcohol, and try to avoid stress. Despite all that, by the time Drs. Warren and Marshall first published their findings in 1984, I'd already been hospitalized three times with bleeding ulcers and had suffered frequent recurring bouts of painful, exhausting gastritis.

Ten years passed before Drs. Warren and Marshall's discovery became widely accepted by doctors. That's when my own doctor first heard of it, in 1994, and asked me if I'd ever been tested for H. Pylori. Sure enough, a simple breath test confirmed that I was infected with the bacteria, and once I was treated with a brief course of antibiotics, I was, and am, free of the disease.

"He was uninfluenced by other people's opinions," Dr. Marshall said about Dr. Warren, remembering how doctors laughed at their attempts to prove H. Pylori caused ulcers. "As far as he was concerned, that was the fact. If you didn't believe it, it was because you were just incompetent or something."

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As I write this now, in September of 2024, there are ongoing wars in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Sudan among other armed conflicts raging in many parts of the globe. There are humanitarian crises in South America, particularly in Venezuela, and immigration tragedies at our southern border, in Europe, Africa, and elsewhere. They all offer innumerable past examples—and future occasions—for bravery or cowardice, for selfless or selfish, for humane or inhumane, for life affirming or death dealing actions.

Barry Marshall & J. Robin Warren: Two scientists win Nobel prize in Physiology or Medicine

In the past eight years, there have been a great many events in America that called for courageous action, and countless people in our country's political system have behaved honorably, often at considerable risk to their reputations, careers and, not infrequently, their very lives.

If history serves as any guide, no matter what happens on November 5, I am certain there will be many more such opportunities—nay, essential obligations—for similarly courageous action.

Drs. Warren and Marshall were surely not expecting to win the Nobel Prize when they tried for years to convince doctors to take their discovery seriously. And despite their enormous impact on countless lives, including mine, I had never heard of them until this year. Similarly, it's very unlikely that Peter Buxtun was seeking fame when he spoke out. And, while by now many people have heard of the Tuskegee study, relatively few remember Peter Buxtun's name.

After my mother told me of pulling her sister to safety, she brushed aside my praise of her bravery. "I didn't know which was the good line or the bad. I just wanted us to stay together."

None of them—nor any of the public servants who behaved so honorably and courageously in America in the past eight years—anticipated the enormous effects of their selfless decisions—effects that are still playing out.

The Jewish sages famously said, "If you save a life, it is as if you've saved the world."To Dr. Warren, Peter Buxtun, the dauntless public servants, and above all, to my mother, I say, "You saved lives. Thank you."

CREATIVE WASHTENAW ANNOUNCED THE 11 MOST RECENT SELECTIONS FOR THEIR POWERART! PROJECT. LOOK FOR THESE ART PIECES AND MORE TO BE INSTALLED ON LOCAL TRAFFIC SIGNAL BOXES AROUND TOWN SOON!

MARY MURPHY AND HER WATERCOLOR PIECE, "DAYBREAK," ONE OF THE 2024 POWERART! SELECTIONS.

This ongoing column features upcoming events within Ann Arbor/Washtenaw County and surrounding areas' Body/Mind/Spirit communities, new (during the past year or two) practitioners and holistic businesses, new books written by local/regional authors, new classes, as well as new offerings by established practitioners and holistic businesses.

A multi-year project, PowerArt! installs art on traffic signal boxes in downtown Ann Arbor. More than 500 people voted online to make the final selections from 15 semifinalists selected by a jury of local art professionals, business owners, and community leaders..

Creative Washtenaw
arts+creative industries=impact

The jury reviewed 107 artworks submitted by 50 Washtenaw County artists. Winning artists included Mary Murphy, Erin Voss, Janet Kohler, James Lee, Richard Goff, Jill Wagner, Bill Burgard, and Thomas Robertson. A few of the artists had more than one piece selected.

Read the article on page 34.

Angel Whispers Healing Center in Dexter celebrated its grand reopening in a new location on November 11 at 11:11 a.m.

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Read the article on page 35.

Lou Weir, a certified Diamond Approach teacher and founder of Insight Meditation in Ann Arbor, will be offering a new program in 2025.

The program, called Diamond Gathering, is open to current Diamond Approach students and to those with no experience. The Diamond Approach, said Weir, is a combination of spiritual teaching based on ancient and modern wisdom and directed inquiry which allows students to explore their own experience and move toward their deepest true nature and potential. What differentiates Diamond Approach from other spiritual practices, Weir said, is the practice of personal inquiry allowing teachings to be explored in a very personal way. It is usually practiced in groups of two and three with students supporting one another's inquiry.

Read the article on page 38.

New Offerings by Established Businesses and Practitioners

Ann Arbor practitioners Heather Glidden and Robin Lily Goldberg became Michigan's first certified Organic Intelligence (OI) mind-body coaches.

Glidden has been an integrative movement therapist and body worker since 2004, and Goldberg has been an interdisciplinary educator and healing arts practitioner since 2010. The two met when Goldberg took a class from Glidden around 2012, and they have been friends and collaborators ever since.

Glidden first encountered OI when she was looking for a safer, more supportive way to help her clients who had long-term effects from past traumatic experiences often resulting in physical pain in the present. The tools she already had available to her were too intense for some clients. "What I noticed about OI right away is what a gentle approach it is and how respectful it is of a person's system," she explained. Goldberg was drawn to OI when she heard about it from Glidden. At the time she was attending graduate school and the Covid19 pandemic was raging. She was researching ways to integrate arts and science in service of social and environmental justice. She was most interested in how it is grounded in neuroscience and complexity science.

OI, they explained, is a gentle conversational method that supports post-trauma growth by increasing presence and bandwidth. It uses positive psychology, somatics, and spirituality in a playful way that often results in sessions filled with laughter. Sessions use free-association conversations interspersed with invitations to connect to the environment through the senses or notice movement in the body. OI coaches recognize and support the impulses that arise naturally in the client's system indicating how their body wants to organize and heal. Goldberg brings it back to evolutionary biology: "before we had lots of breathing and other holistic exercises, our bodies and systems evolved to deal with [stress and trauma]. We are revitalizing what is already within us and reminding our systems that they know how to heal." She described the method as "holistic, but also systems-based," which she had not seen with other modalities. She also said that it is "based on a lot of really rigorous, good science, but there's also a very spiritual piece to it…. We can meet people where they are as to which parts they are interested in."

Glidden has begun integrating OI into her movement and massage work. Clients have been able to move more comfortably than before, releasing their stuck tension patterns and gaining more traction in the work they are doing. Goldberg is using OI in her work with educators and in social justice spaces. In both fields, she explained, the rate of burnout and need for resilience is extreme. OI allows people to organize their systems so that they are dealing with stress and trauma automatically without having to call up extra reserves of energy to deal with things. They become more grounded and centered naturally, achieving more ease in their daily work. She calls it a "paradigm shifting modality."

Goldberg and Glidden are excited to bring OI to Michigan and to inspire the Ann Arbor community with this refreshing approach to healing. Both offer one-on-one OI sessions: Glidden online or in-person at her home studio in northeast Ann Arbor, and Goldberg online or in-person outdoors in the warmer months.

More information is available on the websites constellationbody.com for Heather Glidden, and aurily.com for Robin Goldberg. Glidden can be reached at heather@constellationbody.com, and Goldberg can be reached at robin@aurily.com.

Creative Washtenaw, a 501c3 Nonprofit organization supporting the arts in the Ann Arbor and surrounding areas, announced the 11 most recent selections for their PowerArt! Project.

A multi-year project, PowerArt! Installs art on traffic signal boxes in downtown Ann Arbor. More than 500 people voted online to make the final selections from 15 semifinalists selected by a jury of local art professionals, business owners, and community leaders. The jury reviewed 107 artworks submitted by 50 Washtenaw County artists. Winning artists included Mary Murphy, Erin Voss, Janet Kohler, James Lee, Richard Goff, Jill Wagner, Bill Burgard, and Thomas Robertson. A few of the artists had more than one piece selected.

The PowerArt! Project started in 2014 with the first installations going up in late 2014 and early 2015. This is the fourth phase, and there are plans for a fifth. Program manager Margaret Woodard explained that urban beautification projects like PowerArt! reinforce walkable areas and beautify urban places making walking more enjoyable. It also lowers maintenance costs as the control boxes were previously covered in graffiti and flyers. In addition to creating beauty in the downtown area, PowerArt! aims to engage local artists and the public in this shared art and design project. The project is supported by the partnership of Creative Washtenaw, the Ann Arbor Downtown Development Authority, and the City of Ann Arbor Public Art Commission with additional support by local public art supporters Larry and Lucie Nisson. The installations are fun and whimsical, popular with locals and visitors alike. Once the project is complete, 50 signal boxes in downtown Ann Arbor will be wrapped.

The pieces selected for 2024 began installation in late 2024 and should be completed by spring of 2025 as weather permits. As some of the original pieces were aging, they are being replaced as well.

More information is available online at creativewashtenaw.org. Questions can be directed to info@creativewashtenaw.org or (734) 213-2733.

Psychologist Katherine Munter, PsyD MEd LP ATR expanded her art therapy practice and moved into a new space on Washtenaw Avenue in Ann Arbor.

During the Covid19 pandemic, Munter said that her belief that connection is vital sharpened. While many of her fellow therapists were content to keep meeting clients online only, she wanted to return to in-person sessions for at least part of the time. Munter has taught and worked at schools, hospitals, and nursing homes with all ages from young children to the elderly. She helps people express themselves through diverse mediums, including collage, paint, pastel, colored pencils, and clay. What medium is used depends on the person's interests and preferences. Sometimes, patients work with large rolls of paper for big pieces, and other times their projects are much smaller. Art therapy, explained Munter, is "more about the process than the final product." She meets everyone where they are whether they have no experience in art or are highly trained. She works with neurodiversity, aging, and trauma. "We often work in a verbal realm," she said, but sometimes working nonverbally through art can "show us things we don't put into words." Sometimes trauma happens to us before we have words to describe it, and sometimes things are painful to put into words. Art therapy, she said, can be inherently soothing, making it helpful for those with anxiety. It forces focused attention on the project in front of you, so it can be helpful for those with ADHD to build focus and concentration. It can help with critical thinking skills and creative problem solving and with resilience and moving through the discomfort of a problem in front of you.

Munter has welcomed colleagues Kemara Allen, LPC NCC MA and Anna Vantsevich, LLPC to the practice which is called Creative Life Therapy. Allen had been working in the prison system, mainly doing traditional counseling, and had a desire to do more with art therapy which her training had focused on. Munter explained that art therapy does not have a license, so art therapists have to be licensed as counselors with additional training in art therapy. Vantsevich will be working virtually with patients as well as in person in the practice's other office located in Howell.

The new Ann Arbor office has three offices and a larger room with a table that can accommodate small groups. It has free parking, is on the bus line, and is

handicap accessible—all factors Munter said were important to her. The practice accepts insurance and self-paid patients and does offer a sliding fee scale. Prospective patients can begin with a free phone consultation to learn more and decide whether it is a good fit. In person and virtual sessions are offered.

Creative Life Therapy's office is at 2350 Washtenaw Suite 2, Ann Arbor, MI 48104. Their website is creativelifetherapy.com. Katherine Munter can be reached by email at katherine@creativelifetherapy.com or by phone at (734) 707-8420.

Jessica Cichowlas became the new owner of the Bring Your Own Container Company.

The store, which started as a popup in 2020 and opened its first storefront in 2021, is focused on reducing single-use plastic consumption by refilling containers many times, as well as stocking women-owned, BIPOC, and LGBTQ-owned small brands supporting sustainable, nontoxic, cruelty-free personal care and household items. Many of the brands are local as well. Customers can bring containers from home, purchase a new one in store, or take one from the free donation shelf. Many of the store's liquid products, such as laundry soap, dish soap, lotion, and castile soap, are sold in large one to thirty-gallon containers that customers refill their smaller containers from. After the large containers are empty, most of them go back to the supplier for cleaning and refilling. This process is called closed-loop, and 61% of the store's refillable products are stocked this way, up from 20% in 2021. Containers are refilled as many times as possible before being recycled by Terracycle, offered on the free shelf, or even donated to a local farm for growing produce or used as rain barrels. The non-liquid products are shipped to the store, plastic-free with recyclable tape and paper inserts, usually in recycled cardboard boxes and no unnecessary packaging.

The store now has two storefronts, one on Jackson Road in Ann Arbor and one in Plymouth, in addition to the original popup location in Kerrytown open Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays with the Farmers' and Artisans' Markets. The founder, Emma Hess, started BYOC Co. as a 22-year-old new graduate from the U of M during the pandemic. She was on a low-waste journey that started in college when she swapped her regular shampoo with a solid shampoo bar to reduce her plastic use. Cichowlas was an early customer and was looking for a career change to something that aligned with her values and goals. "Being a business owner can be a tough gig," explained Cichowlas. Two years after opening the business, as a young, recent graduate with a Sociology degree, Hess was considering exploring other career opportunities potentially with more stability. The sale was made with Hess remaining as a mentor to Cichowlas behind the scenes.

Cichowlas' favorite items in the store are the solid dish soap from Dexter-based Tiani Body Care ("it lasts so long," she said) and the stain stick from Bubble Babes in Ann Arbor. She said that the store carries a lot of "stuff that's not on Amazon," and that it makes sustainable lifestyle products approachable. Between the locations she employs four part time workers, and she cycles between the stores and popup doing ordering, finances, merchandising, and serving customers when she can.

The store does sell products online as well. Customers can order products to pick up at the store or have them shipped to their homes. One specialty is the build-your-own gift basket which customers like for holidays, teacher appreciation gifts, and for other special occasions. Cichowlas said that another aspect that sets the store apart is the deep dive she does when vetting new suppliers. She checks to make sure the brands are paying living wages, source high-quality plant-based ingredients, and avoid plastic usage in their packaging including when shipping products to the store.

The Bring Your Own Container Company store in Ann Arbor is located at 25 Jackson Industrial Drive, Suite 500, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. The website is byocco.com, and Jessica Cichowlas can be reached via email at hello@byocco.com.

Angel Whispers Healing Center in Dexter celebrated its grand reopening in a new location on November 11 at 11:11 a.m.

The new space at 3045 Baker Road is four times the size of their previous location on Ann Arbor Street, which they opened on the same date in 2022, and which was much bigger than their original 70 square foot office.

Angel Whispers operates as a 501c3 nonprofit organization and is run by Reiki Master Danielle Groth and Pastor Vicky Lovell along with musician and mystic Dr. Dan McConnell. It is a healing center and healing collective bringing together practitioners of various healing modalities in one place. They also house a boutique selling spiritual items like crystals and tarot cards. Local artists and makers also offer their goods including handmade teas and soaps, jewelry, clothing, and more.

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Deep Spring Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit. See website for details.

The center houses many events including Reiki group healings, sound baths, classes, workshops, and retreats. There is a Bible study, meditation group, a spiritual discussion group, and a new Alcoholics Anonymous meeting is starting on Wednesdays at noon.

There is a massage chair and a sound healing table that people can use without a practitioner. Spa and healing services offered include Reiki, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT or "tapping"), sound therapy, and massage therapy with Michelle Chute. Lovell and Groth offer a unique energy healing experience called Wonder-Twinning by working together with reiki, sound healing, and prayer. They said that they have a "holy synergy" working together in this way. Lovell offers a signature "Shift Your Lens" program which addresses root causes of emotional, physical, and spiritual problems with reiki, clinical EFT, vibrational sound healing, prayer, and meditation. She also offers pastoral care including Christian baptism, weddings, funeral services, hospital, and house visits. McConnell offer spiritual direction appointments.

The new space does have openings for two more practitioners to join the collective to hold classes or provide services. "We can do so much more now that we have the space," said Groth. Future possibilities include fitness classes, yoga, and other activities incorporating body, mind, and spirit. A conference room that holds eight to ten people and a larger group space for 20 to 40 people depending on the activity are available to rent.

Groth and Lovell started working together when Groth, a parishioner at Lovell's church service, asked in the line after service "you're always telling us to love ourselves. Do you love yourself?" She then offered reiki to Lovell, and they started meeting on a regular basis, eventually creating their Wonder Twinning healing sessions and the Angel Whispers idea. Said Lovell: "God is using us together in crazy unbelievable ways. We literally see miracles every day."

Angel Whispers Healing Center is now located at 3045 Baker Road, Dexter, MI 48130. More information is online at angelwhispers.org. Vicky Lovell and Danielle Groth can be reached by email at info@angelwhispers.org. or by phone at (734) 276-2682.

Local healer, author, and teacher Eve Wilson is starting a new cycle of her Healing & Ascension Monthlies series on January 30th.

The series has been ongoing, with new cycles beginning every six months, for 14 years, but it continues to evolve over time, covering different themes and topics. The current theme is Ascending the Ego Identity. Said Wilson, "We have been ascending into greater unity.... Now we are recognizing that we are that higher self; human identity is temporary." The series and its participants are focused on both self and world-level ascension. "We are all part of that oneness, that pure spiritual state.... Bringing that into the world is the process of ascension," she said. "We are co-creating life; instead of many individuals competing.... so that unconditional love can be in charge."

Each series tends to attract a mix of new people and some that have been around for a long time. The original group of 12 has grown to around 40 people. They meet by phone, said Wilson, because it's easier for everyone, and because it's "about individuals mastering themselves," not necessarily

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about being social. Everyone is at a different level of spiritual experience and "everyone gets their own classroom spiritually." There is no sense of competition or conflicting energies when no one is thinking about what they look like or what others look like. "In the new world we are who we are, and we're perfect," said Wilson. "That has always been the case, but we get confused with this reflective sense of self."

One of the exciting things about this series, she said, is working with higher sets of chakras, beyond the seven primary chakras that most people with some spiritual experience know about. This allows participants to "move out of our own aura into part of our soul/spirit aura that is already with our higher self and God." Wilson said that this allows people to hold higher vibrations, changing bodies, emotions, minds, and ego, "moving into who we are in eternity and out of the limitations of ego." They feel less stressed, are filled with more ease and humor, and can make clearer, more confident choices in all aspects of their lives.

Calls are recorded, so participants do not have to listen live if they are not available. Everyone receives spiritual vibrational support for the entire month, said Wilson. For the newest series, classes are offered every four Thursdays starting on January 30 from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m.

Information and registration are available online at spiritualhealers.com/participate. Eve Wilson can be reached by email at evew@spiritualhealers.com.

After seven years in downtown Ypsilanti, Evenstar's Chalice closed the doors to its in-person boutique on North Huron Street.

Its related gathering space on Packard Road also closed in May. Owners Mara Evenstar and Russ Jones said that the decision to close the spaces was multifaceted, but to put it simply, it had become unsustainable. Evenstar said that they were proud to have survived the pandemic, but then they were immediately challenged by two years of construction directly in front of the store, greatly reducing foot traffic. Inflation, high residential rent, and post-pandemic poverty had roles as well–people had less disposable income to spend on things like metaphysical supplies, and downtown Ypsilanti had started to feel less safe, so people stopped coming to the area as often.

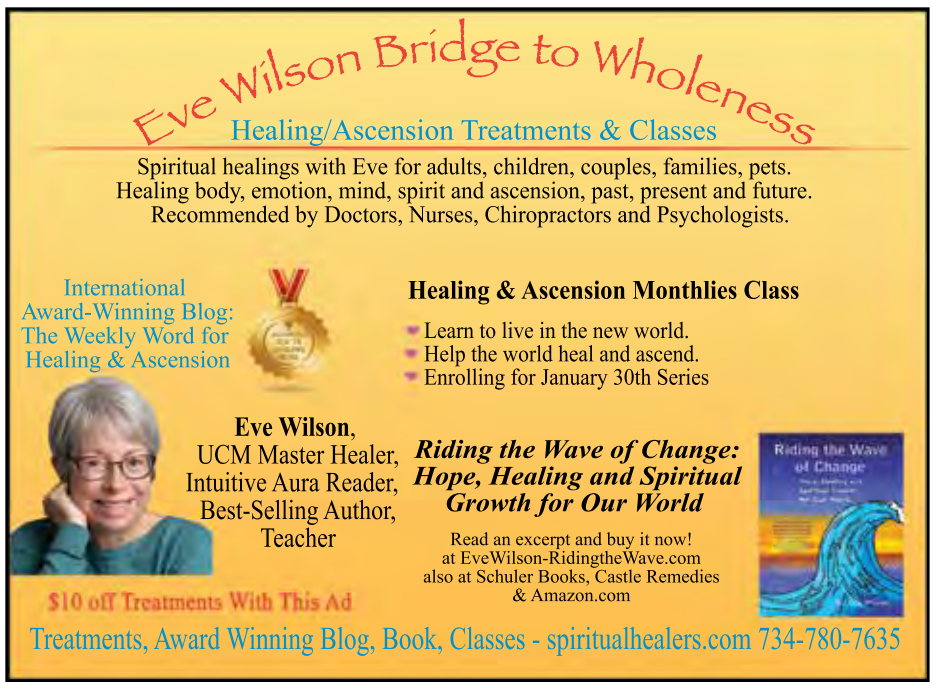
Despite the store's closure, Jones, Evenstar, and others associated with Evenstar's Chalice are still very much present and continuing to offer services and supplies to the Ypsilanti community. The store is open online and at local vendor shows, and still offers books, candles, home décor, ritual items, tarot cards, and more. Jeanne Adwani, who used to maintain a hair salon in the back of the store, now owns Jeanne's Sovereign Relics at 226 West Michigan Avenue, where she still cuts hair under the business name Be Hair Now and sells antiques, collectibles, and vintage items.

The shop and gathering space's many events, classes, workshops, and rituals are still happening regularly but have moved to other rented spaces such as 7 Notes Natural Health on Packard in Ann Arbor.

Evenstar recently secured an office space in Atria Park on Hogback Road to allow her to serve clients in her private practice offering "spiritual life support," energy clearing, Reiki, and mystic guidance. Her 10-session online course "Shadow Work through the Chakras" will start in January. For those who have already experienced the course, she will offer a new series of mini retreats with one session offered in each quarter of 2025. The series is called Shadow Work Flower Power and is based on Rachael Maddox's book: *ReBloom: Archetypal Trauma Resolution for Personal & Collective Healing*.

Evenstar and Jones are open to the possibility of a future retail space, said Evenstar, but for now they are in somewhat of a liminal space awaiting further guidance from spirit to see where it takes them.

Mara Evenstar can be reached by email at Mara@evenstarschalice.com. More information about her services is available online at maraevenstar.net. Her office is located at 2020 Hogback Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48105.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What's New in the Community

By Lynda Gronlund

New Books by Area Authors

Local author Angela Shinozaki, writing as A. Kidd, published her second children's book, *Yasuko and the Dream Eater*.

It is a picture book for ages four to eight inspired by a Japanese oral legend. "If you have a bad dream, call the Dream Eater three times, and he will come and gobble it up. But if he's still hungry he might gobble the good dreams, too."

Shinozaki is an American married to a Japanese man who was born and raised in Japan. They have frequently traveled to visit his family for extended periods where she has learned about Japanese culture. Their seven-year-old daughter attends a Japanese immersion school in Livonia. In the book, the character is visiting her grandmother in Japan. "In Japanese culture, they don't usually hug much," said Shinozaki. At bedtime, parents might show affection differently like patting the child's forehead or rubbing their back. The character Yasuko misses her parents' hugs at bedtime, but her grandmother holds her hand which she sees as a "tiny hand hug." Despite the cultural differences, the characters can still connect said Shinozaki. The book, she said, celebrates bicultural families like her own.

The book also contains instructions for the origami paper crane and has some resources for other origami projects for children to learn. Shinozaki's daughter likes origami and "half the time she's teaching me," she said. Shinozaki said that she usually starts children off with the origami jumping frog because it's easiest, "and they can make it jump."

Shinozaki is a children's librarian in addition to writing. She said that she wanted to be an author since childhood which is why she writes under her maiden name, Kidd. She wants kids to know they can be authors. She said that being around all the children's books in her work has definitely inspired her.

Yasuko and the Dream Eater gives children a creative way to deal with bad dreams encouraging them to think of someone they love when they are scared. This gives them some agency over what they are experiencing said Shinozaki. The illustrator, Marsha Misawa, is Japanese. The book also contains a cultural note at the end.

Future book plans for Shinozaki include a young adult novel set in a dystopian future which is "deep in revision," she said.

More about Shinozaki,her books, and upcoming author events is online at akiddwrites.com. She can be reached by email at a.kiddswrites@gmail.com.

Local psychotherapist, retreat organizer, and speaker Tanis Allen has published her first book, *The Self-Led Internal Family Systems Workbook: Learn IFS Skills to Understand and Love All Your Parts*, January 2025.

The book, published by Zeitgeist, a division of Penguin Random House, is intended for the general public and allows individuals to learn about and work with the Internal Family Systems model of psychotherapy independently of formal therapy. Allen has been teaching and training in the IFS model for over 25 years and uses it in her own life. The book is a "practical guide for anyone interested in accessing their internal world and trying the IFS process on their own for self-exploration and self-restoration," explained Allen. She said that IFS takes participants on a "journey of understanding and self-acceptance" in a non-pathologizing way. It "puts the client in the driver's seat" and establishes them as the expert in what is going on inside of them, putting the therapist in the role of facilitator or copilot. The book allows people to do this on their own without the aid of a therapist. This might be useful to people who are having a hard time finding an affordable therapist, one that works with their schedule, or since the demand for therapy in many areas exceeds the number of qualified professionals, anyone to work with them at all.

The basic idea of IFS is that each of us has different parts with different roles, perspectives, and agendas. There is also a core self—a part which is "naturally curious and compassionate and confident" that can be accessed, said Allen. Everyone has experienced times when one part of them wants to do something, and another wants to do the opposite: stay or go, exercise or relax, persevere or give up. Allowing the core self to be present to the other parts' perspectives in a loving, respectful, and compassionate way can create deep healing.

IFS founder Dr. Richard Schwartz, when he was working on the IFS model in the 1980s, was very committed to backing the model with scientific study, and Allen said that this prevented him from speaking much on the spiritual aspects. More recently, as the model has been extensively studied and proven beneficial, he has explored and spoken about these aspects more. He wrote in the magazine *Psychotherapy Networker*,"We are sparks of the eternal flame, manifestations of the absolute ground of being." Allen said in her book that "…for me, Self is the divine spark within each of us; it is that which connects us to one another and to the greater Self-energy that's out there within the context of whatever belief system we might have."

Tanis Allen can be reached by email at tanis_jo@yahoo.com. She is working on scheduling book readings and signings in the early part of 2025 and will publish details as they are finalized on her Facebook page at facebook.com/tanis.j.allen/. More information about the book is online at penguinrandomhouse.com/booksandt. Itcan be purchased at the Crazy Wisdom Bookstore.

Ann Arbor resident Melanie Wick Singer is publishing her first book in February of 2025 through Harper Collins.

Martina's Muy Bad Day is a children's picture book for ages four through eight. Singer is a speech and language pathologist who works with both children and the elderly. She has always loved writing and recently took some classes about writing for children. She wanted to help bridge the gap between children and the elderly so she included elderly people in the book. It is dual language and celebrates bilingual families like her own. Singer's mother is from Colombia, and while Singer does not consider herself bilingual, she said she knows enough Spanish to get by. She said that she wished more books had multiple languages when she was growing up to make it easier for children to learn more than one language.

In the book, Martina has the worst of days and tells her grandmother all about it. Abuela has some ideas for Martina to deal with her feelings, but she doesn't find any of them very helpful. So, she comes up with her own way of coping involving music, balloons, dancing, and celebrating to release the pain of her bad day. Singer said, "sometimes we do the things we know we 'should' do... Meditation, deep breathing, journaling. But if we look inward and listen to our bodies and hearts, sometimes healing comes from unexpected places."

Singer has read the book to her own eight-year-old daughter who was six at the time it was written. It was based on some of the tough times they had during the Covid19 lockdown and some very unexpected setbacks they experienced. They would have "very bad day parties" with balloons and banners, and they Facetimed with Singer's parents. Together, they learned to cope through some really hard things, and this was something Singer wanted to share with other children.

The book is already available as an audiobook and an ebook; the print edition is on pre-order and will be released in February. Harper Collins picked it up as

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part of a two-book deal, so there will be another book coming out in late 2025 or early 2026. Singer is in the process of submitting other manuscripts as well. There will be a launch party on February 4 with all details to be announced on her website.

Melanie Wick Singer's website is wickmelanie.wixsite.com/website, and she can be reached via email at wickmelanie@hotmail.com.

Upcoming Events

Lou Weir, a certified Diamond Approach teacher and founder of Insight Meditation in Ann Arbor, will be offering a new program in 2025.

The program, called Diamond Gathering, is open to current Diamond Approach students and to those with no experience. The Diamond Approach, said Weir, is a combination of spiritual teaching based on ancient and modern wisdom and directed inquiry which allows students to explore their own experience and move toward their deepest true nature and potential. What differentiates Diamond Approach from other spiritual practices, Weir said, is the practice of personal inquiry allowing teachings to be explored in a very personal way. It is usually practiced in groups of two and three with students supporting one another's inquiry.

The Diamond Gathering program will meet on Saturday mornings from 9to 11:30 a.m. on January 4, March 8, April 5, May 3, and June 7, at Insight Meditation's space on Little Lake Drive in West Ann Arbor. Each session will include a meditation, a teaching on a topic, and personal inquiry in twos and threes. Topics include value (how we seek it in outside things), loving the truth (and how it is limited), practicing presence, and basic trust. Each topic will be explored with directed inquiry to see how they apply to each individual's own life. All are invited to attend as many sessions as they would like.

Weir has been practicing the Diamond Approach for over 20 years and teaching it for several years. He has a love to share the practice as an important component of one's spiritual journey and felt this was a good way to make it more accessible for beginners and to provide continuing support for those who have attended retreats. He expects a mix of beginners and experienced students at the Gatherings. He said that three types of people can benefit from this work. The first is those who feel a sense of authenticity present in their lives, who feel like they present themselves in different ways and circumstances rather than being comfortable with who they are. The second is people who have had a meditation practice or have experienced some openings that allow them to see that the world is more than the material but haven't been able to apply those insights to their ordinary life. The third is general seekers who are looking for ways to understand the reality of our lives. "This practice is a lifetime practice so it's not for everyone," he said. "It requires a certain amount of steadfastness… you have to be willing to look at your habits and the way you live your life. You need to be someone who is willing to explore one's self."

More information is available at diamondapproachmichigan.org. Lou Weir can be reached by email at diamondworkmichigan@gmail.com.
Insight Meditation is located at 180 Little Lake Drive #1, Ann Arbor, MI 48103.

Ann Arbor based master numerologist Gayle Fitzgerald will hold a special virtual event titled Line up with the Vibrational Power of 2025 & Thrive (or risk taking a dive) on January 29 at 6 p.m.

This event is free for all.

Fitzgerald said she has been concerned about 2025 for a long time. She explained that there are positive, negative, neutral, and destructive aspects of the year's energy. 2025 reduced to a 9 in numerology which she said is associated with purification, ending, and completion. 25 reduces to a 7 which has a vibration of upliftment and a clearing of old consciousness that is no longer serving. She said that she feels 2025 will be a year of "letting go, letting God, surrendering, and keeping the faith," and that the more people can line up with the energy, the higher the flow will be in their lives. She said that we need to be aware of thought patterns, consciousness, and beliefs and be ready to release what is not serving the highest good. Letting go of the old can allow more of the positive new energy to come in while trying to hold onto the past can bring us down and make life more difficult.

Fitzgerald said that this event will help people prepare for the general collective vibration of 2025 to "receive the treasures and pass the tests" the year will bring. If we can do that, she said, "it can be a great time of connection and positive and progressive change."

What's New in the Community

By Lynda Gronlund

Fitzgerald is also an energy healer and a celestial conduit and will be providing healing energy for the people attending the event to help them get through the challenges, transmute the negative, and feel uplifted.

More information is available at celestialvibrations.com. Gayle Fitzgerald can be reached by phone at (734) 327-8423 or by email at admin@celestialvibrations.com.

New Classes

Eileen Ho and Larry An began offering introductory Japanese Taiko Drumming classes through Ann Arbor Rec & Ed in 2018, but the classes were put on hold during the Covid19 pandemic.

The classes returned around the fall of 2022 and are being offered as monthly two-hour sessions in which participants can explore the art form through demonstrations and hands-on activities. Ho and An are the leaders of the Great Lakes Taiko Center, which prior to the pandemic was located in Novi, but which now rents event spaces in Ann Arbor and Novi.

Taiko, explained Ho, is a performance art form rooted in Japanese music. The drums have been used for over two thousand years for gatherings, religious ceremonies, festivals, and war. Historically Taiko has been performed with an ensemble, and as it evolved, it was used as an accompaniment to opera or court music. Now, said Ho, it is a "growing global art cultural movement" with many people, artists, and students practicing and learning together. Groups participate in collective play, she said, through moving in space, using their voices, and playing instruments.

Ho and An both grew up in Ann Arbor but moved to the Twin Cities in Minnesota. They saw a Taiko performance in college and years later took their children to see one. They learned that the group offered community classes and decided to learn the art form. When they returned to Michigan in 2009, they were happy to find out that Taiko was being taught in Michigan through the Great Lakes Taiko Center with teachers from Japan and from North America. Today, they own and direct the Center, through which they teach and perform. Their Ann Arbor Rec & Ed classes are an outreach to the community so that people can learn about and experience the art.

Monthly Ann Arbor Rec & Ed Taiko Drumming classes are scheduled for January 26, February 23, March 23, and tentatively for April 27, at the Rudolph Steiner High School on Pontiac Trail. The Great Lakes Taiko Center provides the drums, and students may borrow or buy the wooden drumsticks called bachi. The class is mostly geared toward adults though students as young as 12 are welcome. The class is a two-hour workshop that meets from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Said Ho, "We welcome anyone who is interested in what we have to offer." She describes the practice as "easy to relate to; it resonates with body and spirit." Everyone is invited to attend regardless of their level of experience with drums or music.

More information about the Great Lakes Taiko Center is online at michigantaiko.net. Eileen Ho can be reached via email at eileen@greatlakestaiko.org. Class registration information is available at michigantaiko.net/aareced.

New Practitioners and Businesses

Local social worker and coach, Michelle Duprey, is launching her new signature program: Stress Rehab.

Duprey grew up in Ann Arbor and holds a bachelor's degree from Michigan State and a master's degree in social work from the U of M. In 2021, she had a brief but intense health scare followed immediately by a trip to Sedona, Arizona for her cousin's wedding, where she experienced a spiritual awakening and decided to completely change her life. She had been working for a nonprofit organization in Wayne County where she had served as a child therapist, clinical supervisor, and director of several programs. She was considered a national subject matter expert in pediatric integrated health care. Despite her success, she quit her job over the phone on the way to the airport in Arizona. She collected her two dogs from home, drove to Florida, and rented a house for a month. Then, she began training as a transformational nutrition coach, focusing on mind, body, and spiritual nutrition. She became a Reiki Master, learned to use the Akashic Records, and completed an Ayurvedic Practitioner program. Finally, she created an LLC and named her business IterVia Health. She is excited to help people using her diverse sets of knowledge and skills.

She is focusing on stress because she said it is an issue that is constantly mentioned in health and wellness but rarely deeply looked at. People are advised to "manage their stress," but mostly the same basic tips are regurgitated over and over without offering real, lasting solutions.

Duprey works with teens, including athletes, college students, new graduates, newly married people, new parents, people who feel burned out at work, and others who need help with stress. She works in a client-centered way, allowing each person to decide how many sessions they need based on their needs, rather than selling pre-determined packages. She said that she encounters many people who feel very "stressed out" and unhappy but believe that "it's just part of life" and there's nothing to be done about it. Stress is natural, she said, but feeling completely overwhelmed and burned out is not. She is excited to help people learn to deal with stress in better ways and said she wants to help "raise a generation that knows how to handle stress!"

Duprey currently offers online sessions only though she would like to have office space to work with people in person in the future. She has also been offering traditional therapy and Reiki sessions.

Anyone interested in working with Michelle Duprey can make an appointment for an assessment via her website stressrehab.net. She can be reached by email at michelle@stressrehab.net.

Submit your listing

for the May through August 2025 issue.

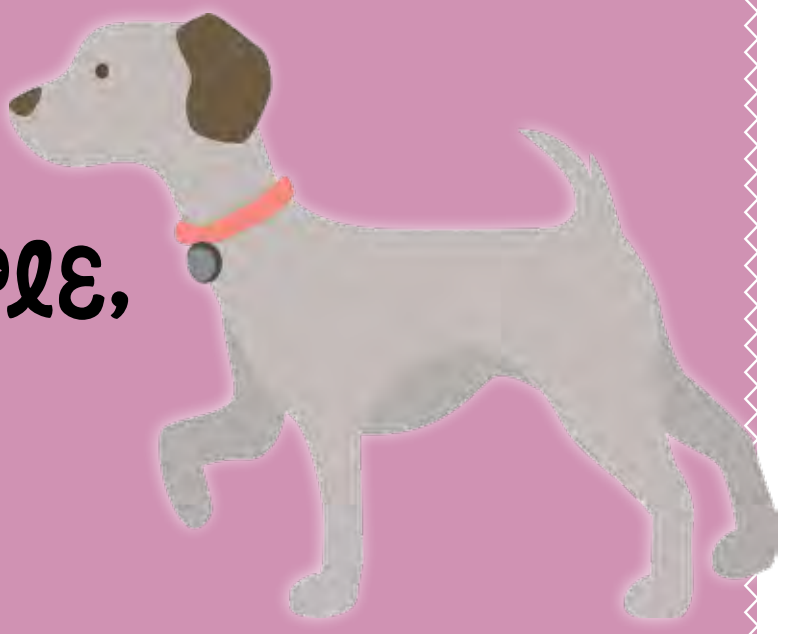
Please note that the "What's New in the Community" column is part of the editorial (not paid-for-advertising) part of the CW Journal, and the editors may or may not include what you submit. Whether the editors include material or not will depend on space considerations, as well as other editorial issues, such as the need for high resolution jpgs and the overall mix of stories included in the "What's New in the Community" column in a given issue.

If you would like to submit information to be considered for this column, please email communitynews@crazywisdom.net.

The firm deadline for submissions for the next issue (May thru August 2025) is March 1, 2025.

K9 Translations:

Training Dogs, and People, with Kindness



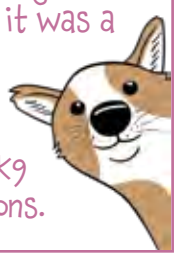
By Sandor Slomovits • Photos by Susan Ayer

The biggest picture on the wall of my home office is not of my wife or daughter, or our parents, or any other relative. It is of a now long-gone but still cherished member of our family—our first dog. Murphy was a brown and white, thirty-pound Sheltie my wife and I adopted a few years after we married. He was, before our daughter was born, our first "child." He was a thoroughly lovable dog. Sharp as a tack—I taught him to sit and shake in about ten minutes—an endless source of delight in games of fetch, and great company—most of the time. He was also an incorrigible chowhound, forcing us to guard our food zealously at mealtimes. He exploded into fits of barking and jumping whenever we had guests or if he saw a bicyclist, car, or dog on our walks. We tolerated it all, not knowing that it might be possible to change those behaviors. We figured it was a small price for living with a wonderful dog.

Things might have been different had we known about K9 Translations.

Kathryn Gordon, 58, owner and operator of the K9 Translations dog training facility in Whitmore Lake, is trim, with a ready smile and a thoughtful way of speaking. She has worked with dogs for most of her life, "But I didn't initially go on a path of becoming a dog trainer." She earned a master's in social work from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, was a social worker for some time, then went back to school and became a lawyer. "I loved law school. I hated practice." During this time, she also had a dog, Misha, and began training with her. "Misha ultimately achieved her CD, which is a companion dog title. She qualified for the nationals and received her Dog World award. We also did the CDX, which is the next level title, and she qualified for the nationals with that too. We did quite well."

We tolerated it all, not knowing that it might be possible to change those behaviors. We figured it was a small price for living with a wonderful dog. Things might have been different had we known about K9 Translations.



But then Gordon developed cancer and was unable to work at her daily job for several years. While she was ill, she acquired a German Shepherd. "I got involved in search and rescue with her and she ultimately became my first human remains detection dog." Gordon went on to nationally certify a number of dogs in crime scene detection, and has deployed for cases in Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. At one point her local dog club asked her to teach scent detection classes, and when she said, "I've never done scent sport," they replied, "At least you've done detection work," and so she began teaching scent and other classes. "I had been training and working with my dog as a search dog, and I continued to do that all the way through chemo. When I finished chemo, I was looking at what would be a career for me. My husband said, 'Whatever you do, do something you like.'" When she was invited to teach dog training classes at several facilities, she recognized that, "This is starting to become a thing. I didn't really choose this career; it seems like it kind of chose me." But, she decided, "If I'm going to do this, I'm going to get my certification," which she did from both The Karen Pryor Academy and the Certification Council for Professional Dog Trainers.

Then along came Covid. Gordon, "Ended up doing a lot of work, only outdoors, with private clients." Eventually, in the fall of 2022, she opened K9T in a large, low building just off a rural stretch of North Territorial Road.

Gordon's goal, as stated on her K9T website, is to teach clients how to "Communicate positively with your dog." Her training method, and it seems her personal philosophy, "Humane and reward-based to build a relationship of trust and respect," is based on positive reinforcement. Instead of punishment or harsh consequences, the dogs learn by being rewarded for doing what their human is trying to get them to do, or not do. "One of the funny things about dog training is a lot of people get into it because they don't like people which is exactly wrong. Unless you're doing a board and train, what you're really doing is training people. When I sat for the certification, because I had an MSW, I didn't need as many hours of dog training because they recognized that having people skills is actually a big part. You have to know how to train the dog, but almost more importantly, how to deal with people.

"I kind of got pulled into this, [dog training] rather than me starting it with intention. But when I started K9T, my intention was very specific. I wanted to create a place where dogs and people could feel safe, where they could learn the skills that they need without being judged, without being berated, without being put down. That was, and is, really important to me."

While Gordon affirms that there are many wonderful people in the dog training industry, she has also seen toxic interactions and behaviors. She thinks some people are aware that there are problems, but others don't even know; they just think that's how it is. "You'll be at a show, somebody will do poorly, and they'll come out yelling at their dog, 'You knew better.' That kind of stuff bothers me intensely. Your dog didn't choose this activity. You did. They don't know what to do unless you help them know what to do. What I think people often forget is that part of their job is to motivate their dog to *want* to do it. Making them afraid *not* to do it is unethical. I feel very strongly that we need to, as a society, start thinking of animals as sentient beings. The ways they see the world are different, but they're not inferior."

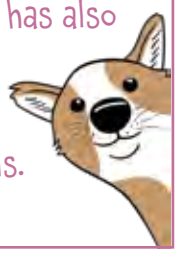
Gordon has witnessed classes where trainers and participants say things like, "I would never let my dog do that." Or people get scolded: "Why did you let your dog do that?' They don't seem to realize that, If those people let their dog do *that*, whatever that bad thing was, it's because they didn't know how to *not* do that. Yelling at them louder isn't making it better. I wanted to create a place where people could come and admit, 'I don't know what I'm doing,' and be told, 'That's okay.'"

She gives an example. "You have a dog who maybe jumps on me. That's okay. We're going to work through it. I start to normalize some of this stuff that they [dogs' people] are going through, instead of them feeling like there's something uniquely bad about them." She understands that everybody struggles with a young dog. "Even dog trainers, struggle with a

puppy. Each puppy is new and has different little challenges. And you have to adjust your lifestyle to deal with it. If a person's dog jumps on the counter and steals the treats, it's not a time to scream at the person or the dog—the dog for taking the treats and the person for letting them do that. You figure it out. What can we do next time—not this time—to make it so that maybe we have better success, and we don't have stolen treats. That was my goal, to create that kind of mentality."

Gordon has assembled a team of trainers at K9T who between them have amassed an impressive array of awards and honors at regional and national competitions and who all share her philosophy and training techniques. They offer a wide range of classes: There are several levels of basic training, where puppies and older dogs, and their people, learn the skills that help them live together harmoniously. Of them are scent detection classes, sports classes such as Agility, in which dogs learn to navigate a series of obstacles, jumps, tunnels, and teeter totters as well as Musical Freestyle where people learn how to teach their dogs a variety of tricks and create a routine to perform to music.

While Gordon affirms that there are many wonderful people in the dog training industry, she has also seen toxic interactions and behaviors. She thinks some people are aware that there are problems, but others don't even know; they just think that's how it is.



I attended an introductory Musical Freestyle class led by Yoko Ichikawa who, along with her Bichon Frise, Kei, has won numerous prizes and tributes in regional and national competitions for nearly fifteen years and is one of the few trainers of Musical Freestyle in Michigan. "This is the only place in our area," she said, "for people who are interested in these sports to get hands-on help to get started with them." After briefly discussing the sport of Musical Freestyle, Ichikawa brought out Kei and demonstrated a standard element of many routines, the weave, where dogs learn to do a figure eight pattern between their handlers' legs, at first while the handler is standing still, eventually while the handler is walking. Then she showed the class, with step-by-step, detailed instructions, how to teach dogs to do the weave.

People enroll in Musical Freestyle—and in Agility classes—to compete in trials, (there are many good examples of both on YouTube) but also to provide enjoy-

The staff of K9 Translations, from left to right, back to front: Rebecca Bastien, Hanna Gould, Debbie Harrison, Yoko Ichikawa, and owner, Kathryn Gordon.

K9 Translations, continued...

able activities and exercise for their dogs, and opportunities for themselves to produce creative joint dog/human choreographies. "And many dogs really seem to like music," added Gordon.

I also sat in on Rebecca Bastien's Reactive Dogs class. Bastien has been dog walking and dog sitting for several years and working with Gordon at K9T for about two. "I came to Kathryn for help with Nirvana, [her rescued Doberman mix], as her needs [fear reactivity] were out of my wheelhouse at the time. With Kathryn, I was able to hone my training skills further and get my certification."

The class's first session was just for the human half of the dog/person pair, and Bastien discussed both the causes of reactivity, usually fear, and the multiple ways they will work in the class to address them. She detailed the safety precautions they'll take, among them having the dogs double-leashed and limiting the class to four human/dog pairs, but she also offered practical advice on how to deal with reactive dogs in ordinary situations, including how to hold a leash properly to avoid injury to human or dog.

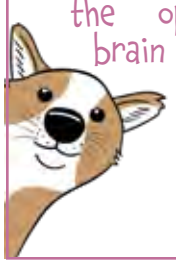
Gordon's goal, as stated on her K9T website, is to teach clients how to "Communicate positively with your dog." Her training method, and it seems her personal philosophy, "Humane and reward-based to build a relationship of trust and respect," is based on positive reinforcement.

I also watched Gordon teach a scent detection class. Before class began, she placed props, chairs, traffic cones, cardboard boxes, and flower planters around her large, mostly empty indoor training room. (She also has an outdoor agility setup.) She scented a few of the objects in advance with essential oils, while others either had cat food in them or no special scent at all. When class began—this was an intermediate class, so the handlers and dogs were already familiar with the exercise—Gordon stood in the middle of the room as the first handler walked in with her White German Shepherd. The handler, who did not know which items were scented, let her Shepherd roam about the room sniffing the various objects. When the Shepherd recognized the essential oil scent on an object, she sat, her handler said, "Alert," and Gordon acknowledged that the dog had correctly found the scent. The handler then rewarded her dog with a treat, and they continued searching.

One by one, the four dog/handler pairs repeated this exercise with Gordon offering calm comments, praise, and suggestions. She pointed out to one person that even though her dog didn't sit to indicate she recognized the scent on one of the objects, she did raise her head each time she walked by it, and that her handler could learn to recognize that signal. Gordon later told me, "As a scent detection person this is important to me; the dog is your partner. They're not your servant; they're not your slave. They have skills that they're bringing to the endeavor, and you have skills. There's a back and forth: it's not all one way. You have to read where they're at; they have to read where you're at. You need to keep adjusting to help each other be successful and to have fun."

"Nose work has additional benefits for dogs. Modern life doesn't give dogs many chances for species typical behaviors; scent detection helps provide dogs with the opportunity to work a significant part of their brain dedicated to olfaction and engage in normal dog behaviors which together can reduce boredom and anxiety, build confidence, and help curb a variety of behavior problems."

—Kathryn Gordon



As with Musical Freestyle and Agility, some people enroll in scent classes as preparation for competitions but, Gordon said, "Nose work has additional benefits for dogs. Modern life doesn't give dogs many chances for species typical behaviors; scent detection helps provide dogs with the opportunity to work a significant part of their brain dedicated to olfaction and engage in normal dog behaviors which together can reduce boredom and anxiety, build confidence, and help curb a variety of behavior problems. This is important because behavior problems often lead to a dog (and their humans) living a very restricted and unhappy life or, in some cases, ending up in a shelter."

> "With this business, we're trying to create a community that supports kind relationships between people and dogs, but also between people and people," said Gordon. "They're learning skills that they can take to other situations that don't involve dogs. They are learning other ways of motivating. A part of my goal is to have a space where people can learn to interact kindly with their animal and kindly with their peers in that context.
>
> "When I have somebody come in and they want to use a pinch collar, [I always say] 'I understand that you're using this on your walks, but why don't you start learning how to handle your dog without it here so that eventually you can let that tool go.' Instead of shaming the person and saying, 'How dare you use this?' We're trying to help people the same way we would with a dog, through reinforcement and kindness instead of punishment."

Owner of K9 Translations, Kathryn Gordon.

Barbara Zmich and her spouse, Celeste McClellan, who've been taking their Mini Schnauzer pup, Rennie, to classes at K9T for over two years, said to me about Gordon, "Kathryn's approach helps you create a more comfortable and meaningful relationship with your dog. But it's not just dog training stuff. Her demeanor is just so kind it makes you feel comfortable…makes the dogs feel comfortable."

"I don't mean to sound grandiose because I know I'm only doing my little, tiny piece," Gordon said, "But I think if you keep having people think this way, learn these techniques, even if they don't integrate them fully, even if all they do is implement them here or there, it's going to start to spread out. And this society needs that so badly. We really need to start handling things differently."

In late October 2024, Gordon learned that due to unforeseen circumstances, K9 Translations would need to move from their Whitmore Lake facility. At press time Gordon was still looking for a new location. In the meantime she and the other K9T teachers are continuing to offer private lessons. For more information, please visit K9Translations.com

All Creatures Great & Small

Winter Coop Wonderland

By Karen Quinn

As the evenings grow colder and the nights get longer, I find myself looking for signs of Jack Frost on the windows and a small dusting of snow on the pines. As the season progresses, I make treks down to the river to see if the edges have started to form their delicate lace of ice and wake up each morning hoping to see a snow-covered wonderland. The kind of snow that brings silence and a deep, peaceful calm to the landscape where, when the sun hits it just right, the world glitters like diamonds.

There are harder aspects of winter as well. The biting cold, harsh winds, and ice storms can make even the most fervent lover of winter begin to daydream about spring. For me, the one part of winter that makes me not quite so excited is the coop in our backyard. Now, I don't want you to think that I don't absolutely adore my hens, because I do! They're a wonderful, constant source of eggs, pest control, and entertainment. Eight months out of the year, they're the easiest things to take care of on our little farm. But for the other four months, they become a great source of stress and are one of the harder chores we handle in the snowy season.

I can also state with confidence that the hens aren't the biggest fans of winter. They miss their bugs, abundance of green snacks, and warm sunshine.

I can also state with confidence that the hens aren't the biggest fans of winter. They miss their bugs, abundance of green snacks, and warm sunshine. They get so bored at times that they will just start bullying each other for fun, even though they have more than adequate space in the coop and run. To combat this bickering, we have devised a few "boredom busters" over the years that not only keep them entertained but us as well.

One of these boredom busters is the cabbage tetherball. We find a nice, dense winter cabbage, hammer a dowel rod through the center, and suspend it from the coop ceiling with bailer twine. We've even leveled it up in the past few years by turning it more into a cabbage pinata by peeling some of the leaves back and putting mealworms and sunflower seeds inside. The excited clucking, clicking, and scrambling that happens when they find the hidden layer of goodies always elicits a burst of laughter from me. We also keep leftover pumpkins, squash, and other vegetables that will keep well when cellared to give them throughout the season. A cracked open old jack-o-lantern never goes to waste at our farm.

Another good way to keep the stir craziness at bay is by making the hens help with rebedding the coop. We do a bedding technique called "deep littering," where we put about 3" to 4" of cedar chips on the floor, and then put a whole bale of straw on top to create warmth. Then we clear the straw that is soiled daily and replace it as needed. But, instead of breaking up the flakes of straw, we only put one or two spread out to get the base layer started, and then we enlist the aid of the girls to do the rest. Same goes for when we replace straw when we take any out. Picking apart the flakes to get the oat seeds,

One of these boredom busters is the cabbage tetherball. We find a nice, dense winter cabbage, hammer a dowel rod through the center, and suspend it from the coop ceiling with bailer twine.

bug carcasses, and whatever else they find in there can be an entire day of entertainment, and because they take it apart more carefully, it keeps the dust down in the coop as well. It's a win- win!

The harder part of this is finding activities that our duck hens enjoy. Chickens are just tiny velociraptors, so if you give them something they can peck at and pull apart for hours, you're good as gold. Ducks, on the other hand, love one thing and one thing only—water. Water in and on everything, all the time. Our way of keeping them as happy as possible is by setting up a heated water bucket in the far corner of the coop because (and I'm sure you can read the writing on the wall), when water is splashed outside of the bucket it quickly turns to ice.

Now, with the ducks, this is simply another opportunity to have a good laugh. They're very deft on their wide, webbed feet so they just slide around chasing each other, and it is an absolute delight to watch. Chickens, on the other hand, are very susceptible to frostbite, so the dance we have to navigate to keep the chickens safe and the ducks happy takes a bit of finesse.

Another interesting factor is that the ducks absolutely love it outside during the winter and would prefer to be out in the run, even if the temperature is hovering below freezing. When it gets really cold, they'll begrudgingly move into the coop, and they will then partake in the chicken's heated watering system, and it's a mess. They get water everywhere and since it's a rustic coop, ice can absolutely happen inside. To combat this, we created a two-part system.

First, the chicken's water is set up on a series of buckets, so most of the water ends up in the bottom basin and not out on the coop floor. The second part came as an investment in a plastic doghouse that we cram full of straw in the run so the ducks have a little extra cover and warmth without having to go into the coop if they don't want to.

Of course, if the weather isn't horrible, and the temperature isn't too low, we let them out into the yard to play and stretch their wings when we do our daily chores, getting the cabin fever out of their systems. The chickens might migrate about two feet away from the coop before looking at me with an air of disdain and turning tail to head back inside. Meanwhile, the ducks will venture a lot further out, sometimes as far as the way back to inspect their pond to see if it's still frozen over before retreating to their water bucket.

All in all, I'm sure compared to most flocks, these girls are spoiled rotten, and I must constantly remind myself of that as I trudge through the cold and snow only to open the coop doors to find eleven sets of brown eyes staring with absolute indifference at the sounds of cackling quacks and splashes resonating against the silence of the snow.

Karen Quinn is a writer and artist who homesteads on a rural urban farm in Livonia with her husband, son, and menagerie of animals. Her favorite things are napping, exploring, and drinking tea.

The Crazy Wisdom Interview with Jim McDonald on Energetic Folk Herbalism

Interview and Article by Bethanni Grecynski
Photos by Mary Bortmas

(Editor's Note: jim mcdonald prefers to spell his name in all lowercase letters, and we have obliged this request in the article.) jim mcdonald is a Michigan original, a passionate and dedicated wisdom teacher who combines a "traditional European folk perspective of herbcraft with the eclectic physio/medical approaches of 19th century American herbalism" into a blend he calls "energetic folk herbalism." We're lucky to have him practicing and teaching in southeastern Michigan. Raised in Clinton Township, he was one of four kids, his dad worked at GM, his parents were living conventional lives, he was an outlier in his family. He went to MSU, worked at radio and recording stations, wanted to be a musician—what he considered a "completely impractical career." Instead, he chose an even more impractical career and has made it work beautifully (though he continues to play the guitar). He has made a very good name for himself in this region, just by being himself and having a deep understanding of herbs and their uses. He teaches herb classes and workshops, maintains a friendly and enticing website (herbcraft.org), leads nature walks, and has a more intensive herb training program which he calls Lindera. (Spicebush is the most common name for the lindera plant.) mcdonald says lindera is an aromatic and calmative plant, yields berries, and is one of his favorite teas.

mcdonald lives in White Lake, with his wife, Stephanie, their three kids, a dog, many cats, and two ferrets. Stephanie is deeply involved in running the business and website, and they "keep doing a little bit better every year." mcdonald is a very winning fellow – chatty, engaging, tangential, lively, casual. He is a man who has developed a deep love for plants, and it shows. "Plants are awesome," he says. They are an "intermediary" between nature and humanity.

It's a Saturday morning at the beginning of spring, 2023. Weathered wheels on my Toyota RAV4 roll into the parking lot of River Hawk Annex at Proud Lake State Recreation Area for the first weekend of Lindera. I bluster into class to find jim—jovial and lively, with a playful smile on his face—warmly welcoming each student who arrives. He presents a mystery tea he prepared for us to sip from travel mugs; we begin feeling into the qualities of the plant and spontaneously call out insights. The room is happy and curious.

I had heard about Lindera through word-of-mouth and felt inspired to commit to the 8-month-long herbal intensive as a means to become more practically aware of plants and better skilled to help my friends and family. jim mcdonald—renowned community herbalist, wildcrafter, medicine maker, and teacher—created the course in 2005 with the focus on foundational energetic principles of western herbalism. He continues to annually offer Lindera and a variety of other plant classes and walks, cultivating herbal connections and shared knowledge.

Now, a perfectly warm May afternoon one year later, my sandalled feet travel toward an old farmhouse at the Michigan Folk School where jim and I meet for an interview about his life and passion. After some laughing and catching up, we sit together in the shade; a strong breeze billows across the picnic table, and we begin to talk.

Bethanni Grecynski: How do you look at herbalism?

jim mcdonald: I look at herbalism as this natural thing that I think pretty much every animal does, and because people are animals, it's just a natural thing that we are inclined to do. Just recently, there was news about an orangutan using a poultice on its face. That just makes sense, because in nature that's what medicine is.

Some people are drawn to herbalism as the thing that they love, just the same way some people are drawn toward putting stuff together, or fixing things, or to be a musician or an artist. Some people like plants, and then discover this relationship with plants where you work with them to help yourself and other people. Herbalism is fun!

Herbalism isn't supposed to be specialized knowledge; it's supposed to be community knowledge...

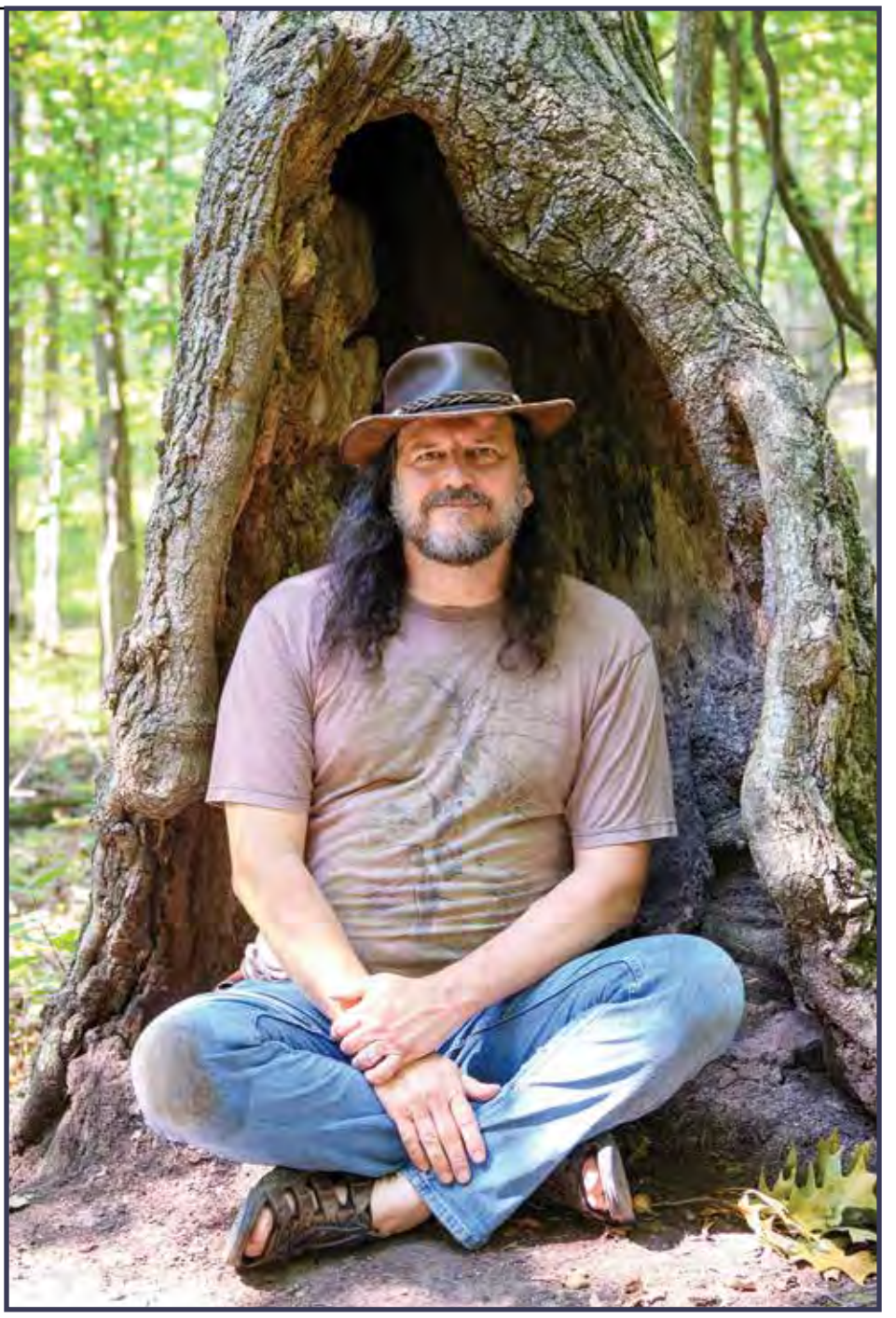
There's this concept of interdependence, and I think that herbalism is the act of interdependence *happening,* rather than the cerebral idea or understanding of that concept. We live in a system of nature where everything is interdependent on each other. With the herbalism that I'm inclined to do—which is not better than anyone else's—I like to use what grows around me. If a deer is in the woods, everything that the deer needs to be healthy is in its habitat. Likewise, we're in the world, and everything we need to be healthy is here. That doesn't mean that everything is fixable. I've heard people say, "There's a cure for everything," and that might be true, but there's not always a cure for every person with every *thing* at the stage that they start to deal with it. So, I feel humble like that.

It feels so fulfilling to work with plants and to be in relationship with them, especially when that relationship is reciprocal: I'm going to harvest plants, but also—because I'm doing that—I'm going to have a lot of respect for them, advocate for them, plant them, steward their habitat, and try to give back. I think that the best way we can give back to the plants is by stewardship.

Bethanni Grecynski: In your own yard, what plants do you love to grow?

jim mcdonald: I'm more of a what-plants-do-I-like-to-find-in-my-yard kind of person. I encourage and mow around plants more than grow them. Though this year I've got some wormwood and hyssop growing...I planted okra…there's some holy basil going…and then—akin to what I was saying about stewarding plants—one of the things that I've done for a really long time is if I see a piece of property that is going to be "developed," I will very often pull my car over, walk around, and look to see: "Is there anything here that is unique to this place that is going to get plowed up? And (if I can) can I dig it up and transplant it somewhere else?" So that's doing root divisions and transplants, gathering seeds from an area and taking it to another area, and saying, "Oh, this plant would grow in this area, I'll throw the seeds down." That's a lot of the way that I cultivate, a little bit more indirectly. I'm not the greatest gardener, but I do a lot of root transplants, mostly with native plants, unless it's on my property and I'm sure they won't take over and cause a problem. Mugwort, for example— if I plant mugwort in my yard, I'll be trying to keep it from taking over for the rest of my life there, so instead what I'll do is find someplace else it's already growing and harvest there to help keep it in check.

jim mcdonald continued...



Bethanni Grecynski: What seeds do you intentionally drop?

jim mcdonald: I always collect a lot of New England aster seeds and butterfly milkweed seeds and spread those all over. And then as far as root divisions, sometimes I've been places and thought to myself, "Wow, I don't see spikenard—for example—very often, but there is just a ton of spikenard here," and without digging it up, I'll just take a little small shoot off in the fall and plant that in a similar place in my yard. I've also planted American ginseng *all* over, because someone once gave me a quart Ziploc bag full of sprouting seeds, so I planted them in my yard, at a bunch of parks, at rest stops on I-75, behind a Big Lots… there were a lot of seeds and they were sprouting; I needed to get them in the ground as soon as possible. So, if you're ever parked behind a Big Lots and you say to yourself, "Is that… no, it couldn't be American ginseng..."—it could be!

BG: We'll call it 'Jim's American ginseng.'

JM: "jimseng."

Collective laughter buoys upward to meet mountains of bright ivory clouds drifting across a blue expanse.

BG: When you're doing root divisions, are there any principles to keep in mind overall, for someone who has never done it before?

JM: Well I'm saying root, but what I'm actually referencing here are rhizomes. Rhizomes are underground stems, and they tolerate division really well, because if you break off a teeny, little piece of them, not only will the plant you collected it from keep growing, but it will usually trigger the plant to grow a little bit more where it was broken off. Kind of like pruning. But you want to be really mindful—so if I'm working with a plant I'm less familiar with, I make sure I know the plant is not endangered, threatened, or a species of concern. For example, spikenard is not endangered; I just don't often see it. When I came across that very abundant stand, I took *one* shoot and moved it. After that, I go back and look at the place from where I collected for at least another year or two—often forever after I'll keep going back—so that I can see: Is it growing more? Is it growing less? Did something happen with it? And most of the places that I do this, I will notice actually more prolific growth because of doing a division.

I just learn so much from plants. They've been here so much longer than us. They know what they're supposed to be doing, and they know who they are.

BG: Considering your own roots, who inspires you?

JM: Oh, who inspires me...my wife, because she's my wife, and that's a good thing; she's wonderful. But also, we've been together for a really long time—we were together when I first started learning about herbs, and she let me try stuff out on her. She was the first person open to me asking, "Hey! I made this, do you want to take it?" And she would. She helped me expand my skills because she let me create things for her.

jim's wife, Stephanie, helps manage all online aspects of making his work more accessible. They have three kids, a dog, many cats, and two ferrets.

I really lucked out, because although I primarily learned on my own when I was getting started, I did eventually meet Matthew Wood and Rosemary Gladstar, and kept in touch with both of them. They were amazingly kind and supportive of me and what I was doing.

There was an herbalist in the Southwest named Michael Moore, who called me up out of the blue one day. I think that I sounded a little bit blubbering speaking to him: I was like, "OMG Michael Moore called me!" He had read stuff that I had written online, and he called me up to find out to what degree I just wrote well and to what degree I knew stuff. Then he said nice things about me to Howie Brounstein and 7Song, who also helped me out. Then there was an herbalist who's still in Detroit named Gary Wanttaja of Nature's Products—he was the first actual herbalist that I met; I would go there, and we would talk and he'd give me little things to chew on, things to think about.

I feel really fortunate that I met people who helped me out and were so kind and supportive about it. I try to give that back—when I see people who are doing great things, I ask myself, "Is there something I can do to support them? Can I mention them to someone else, or speak highly of them?" I've really lucked out because the majority of the people that I've met and students I've had are great people, friendly and kind, and it's a good relationship.

BG: Who are some of the people that you recommend in the area?

JM: Oh! I've got a Bloodroot Herb Shop tee shirt on; Corinne Denomme and Alex Crofoot run that. Gary Wanttaja has Nature's Products in Detroit. Southwest of Lansing, there's Golden Hour Farm with off-the-charts, really high quality herbs. Ginny Denton at Linden Tree Herbals makes amazing bitters. Lottie Spady, who lives up in Clarkston and teaches a ton in Detroit, is such an inspiration and is doing great work in her community.

I love when people are out there doing stuff. The more people who do things, the more access there is for people who want to learn. It's not that there's a best teacher; to a certain extent there is right and wrong information—but also, in a completely different way, there are just a bunch of perspectives, and sometimes people need a different perspective than I can offer. It feels great to me when someone asks me something and I can say, "I actually might not be the right person for that, but I know this other person," because I love making connections—so that this network of plant people grows tighter and more connected.

I have a collective discussion group for people who have been through Lindera, and each year also has their own group. Sometimes I'll see a question come through, and if I have the time and something really unique to say maybe I'll answer right away; but, I often just let it sit and other people will answer. Honestly a lot of times there's nothing I have to add—it might be something that someone else knows more than me about; they've covered the issue at hand well, and I feel relieved.

Plants don't think, "Well, look at my circumstances, I can't possibly thrive and grow in these circumstances, because it's terrible." They're like, "This is where I'm at, I'm going to just live with all the vital force that I have, and be what I am."

I think that there's an older idea about nature and survival of the fittest and competition of species, and—absolutely—in nature, competition exists; but, it is by no means the guiding principle. The guiding principle of nature seems to be cooperation; the systems work interdependently. If we're going to have a system of herbalism that is rooted in the principles of nature—which is at least what I want to do—then there's not a piece of nature that's the most important thing.

And it's all perspective: what might be most important to one species isn't the same thing that's most important to another species, and so one teacher who's most important to a certain person might not be the same for another person. So, I just think it's great; I love having more colleagues. When I think about past students, at a certain point I don't want to refer to them as past students anymore. They took my course, got some ideas, thought about it, tweaked them in their own way, learned other things, and put it together in a way unique to them. I'm not the reason that the insightful students I've had are insightful; it's about *their* curiosity and connection to the plants. Our paths cross, hopefully more than once, and maybe we get to walk alongside each other for a while.

jim—now 51—was raised in Clinton Township, Michigan, where he lived until he went to college at Michigan State University. While living in an old farmhouse in Okemos he stumbled across an herb book that was left out and started collecting plants from the land there.

BG: How long have you been helping people through herbalism? What are some things you've learned along the way?

JM: This year, 2024, is 30 years from when I started specifically studying herbalism. I've always thought that learning herbalism is kind of like learning cooking, in that you learn it and you start doing it at the same time. It would be really bizarre if someone said, "I've been studying cooking for about a year or two, and now I feel confident enough that I'm going to try to cook something." So, when you're studying herbalism, I think that you learn stuff and you try it out, again and again. The more that you can try out different things on yourself and other people—who have said that it's okay, that's the important part—the more you can really get an understanding. Like most everyone, I initially started out thinking and learning, "What herb is good for this problem?" and, "What problem is this herb good for?" Now what I think is, "What are the qualities, nature, and virtues of this particular plant?" and, "How would that be helpful or not helpful for an individual person?" The more people we work with we'll start to see things like, "This marshmallow is really good for *this* kind of cough, and these kinds of people, and maybe not so much over there." So, in 30 years, I'm just still trying to figure more and more of that out with greater and greater nuance.

BG: And what the person's nature and virtues are, too.

If I see an herbalist who has a formula for something, I can look at the ingredients on the bottle and it gives me an insight into that particular person's artistic expression of how they put things together.

JM: Yea, so we have to think about that. And the cool thing about that is it means that learning is never-ending, because there's always new directions to take it, new understandings to have, and old understandings to let go of.

BG: What do you do at the point of revision? Do you feel like you have to address or correct the old understandings that you shared in the past?

JM: I open up the file that has all of my handouts, search the term to find everywhere it's written down, and fix it. If it was just a mistake and nothing dangerous, I'll add it to class stories. "I said this and thought this for a while and I found out it was wrong," and that's cool, because then it models that we have ideas and we hang on to them, then we find out that they're wrong and we let them go. We used to think that there wasn't lymphatic activity crossing the blood-brain barrier and now we know that there is; we used to think that the appendix was a vestigial organ and now we know that it is not. So, it's not just in herbalism, it's not just with me—that's just the nature of learning.

BG: When was the first Lindera? What was the inspiration?

JM: The reason I started teaching at all is because people told me, "You should teach classes." Before that, it had never crossed my mind. But I got asked and asked and asked, and I think I relented just so people would stop asking me. I offered a 7-hour herb walk as the first class, and then another one, and another one, and that was around '98.

Then probably between 2003 and 2004, people who were coming regularly to day classes suggested I start a longer course, so we began to meet about one Thursday evening and one Saturday every month. Over the years that changed to roughly one weekend a month, which is what Lindera is still at now.

Before herbalism, jim earned a living working at radio stations and recording studios. He gives much credit to his boss at that time, Barry—who helped him build his first website, let him use the copier for thousands of class handouts, had a tolerant attitude about chopping up foraged herbs in the break room at lunch, and was graciously flexible with schedule when people started to ask Jim to teach around the country. Initially, jim worked full-time at the studio and did herbs on the side but transitioned to herbalism full-time as things panned out

jim mcdonald continued...

more and more. Now, all of his work involves gathering herbs, making medicine, writing, teaching, and endlessly learning about plants.

BG: What are some insights you've had along your journey?

JM: Before people asked me to teach, I had never done that or considered it at all. So on the journey of becoming a teacher I've come to the unexpected personal insights that I love teaching, I love seeing things click for people, and I love making my classes fun.

There's a kind of learning where someone tells you something and you memorize it and can say it back or write it down—and then there's a kind of learning where you get to the point of, "Oh, ok I get it, this is why it makes sense," and there's a real connection. That's what I'm striving for—to teach something in a way that is usable and makes common sense—so that students gain the confidence and foundation necessary to safely extrapolate and explore on their own and in community.

I want people not just to learn a lot but to think, "I had fun, I enjoyed it too." That's why I like to figure out how ridiculous I can get with all the props that I use. I've also realized over time that whenever I use a prop or when I tell a story or joke, those things become the anchor for the concept. People remember the joke, or the donuts, the garden shears, the piece of leather, the castle, the catapult—and those things become the placeholder to remember the whole ideology and story, rather than having to remember terminology or a flow chart.

I have a lot of respect for conventional medicine, it does a lot of things that are important, and it does things that you can't do with herbalism, but the dynamic between a practitioner of conventional medicine and the people who go to see them is often a really one-sided dynamic.

I started teaching like that because of what it takes for me to learn. When I would feel confused or unsure about something, I would just sit and open-endedly wonder about it with the goal to understand better. I would toy with it and toss the idea around in my mind, and occasionally have an insight, "Maybe it's like this!"

BG: What do you love about Lindera?

JM: I love the students. For me, when I think about teaching, the Lindera course is my favorite thing that I offer every year. Not because I don't like my other classes, but because I get to see the same group of people more consistently, eight weekends a year. I get to know them, see them make friends, and in a lot of cases see the friendships that they make in the course maintained for years after. I also love the walks; I get to take people to some of my favorite places and show them my favorite plants. Almost exactly last year, at the beginning of the June weekend, we did the walk at Bald Mountain—and we were sitting with the sassafras and the blueberries and the wintergreen, and it just struck me in a way that was unique. I thought to myself, "I've been teaching in this exact same spot with groups of people for almost twenty years. My class, coming and sitting in this spot with these plants is a part of the cycle of this place," and that just made me so happy. It made me so happy for the students, the plants, and that piece of land—it's just very fulfilling.

BG: What defining features do you see in a healthy wild place? How do you help care for the landscape and ecosystem?

JM: What is really important is to learn about the ecosystem and to learn about the habitat, and not just the things you're looking for in that habitat, or that you *want* something from. So, the questions become, "What is the soil like?" or "What is the understory like?" or "What kind of forest is this? Is it a beech-maple forest?

Is it an oak savanna?" When you do that, you begin to understand the nature of that kind of place, and you might say, "Oh! There are some plants that maybe used to be a part of this ecosystem, that aren't any more, because it's no longer an old growth forest"—and it could be a swamp, it could be a meadow—we're just happening to use forest in this example—"There was farming, trees grew back, some of the understory came back and some of the understory didn't. How could I maybe restore some of those plants? What do I think maybe should be here; what's native to this place? How can I tend to it?" There are a lot of places that I go to that have a lot of invasive species, and that's problematic—not because invasive species are inherently bad plants or that we need to vilify them. They're just being alive and having babies and families; they're able to grow and spread where they're at very effectively. But, in that process, there are also plants that are maybe not able to live there that should be able to, and I think we can acknowledge some of the disruption—or in some cases, destruction—of a habitat by invasive species without having to make that species inherently bad. And if we're lucky, that invasive species has some kind of utility to it—maybe we can eat it, maybe it is great building material or has some kind of medicinal nature.

If we can apply some kind of useful action or create positive resources, I think that's a great way to manage invasive species. There's a time and a place for herbicides, I think—I'm not inclined toward that, but I know people who do really important habitat restoration, and that's how they're able to do it. So, despite my personal aversions to that particular tactic, it would be kind of judgmental and dogmatic just to label that as inherently terrible. Probably, I need to maybe think about doing that with the bittersweet that is taking over my yard, because my ability to utilize it is not sufficient to control it, and it is starting to cause problems to the other species there.

BG: So, there's an aspect of harmony and balance that you're looking for?

JM: Yes. If I look at the big picture, I see invasivity as a stage that non-native plants may go through before they naturalize, and they are sort of just a part of the ecosystem. There has been so much historical movement of plants. Some people say, "Invasive species, that's just a part of what plants do," but—as with climate change—we cannot deny that humans have really severely impacted the scope by which that happens, and the rate and speed, because it's not just a plant being introduced to a place, it's a plant being introduced to a place in a lot of cases where we have altered or damaged the habitat in a way that is detrimental to the native species and advantageous to the non-native species. If we want those native species to continue to exist, we have to do some kind of management to help them out, to compensate for the ways that we've altered the environment in a way that is damaging to them—and that is a whole field of study. As an herbalist, if there's a plant that is non-native and either growing invasively or aggressively, I'll try to really think, how can I utilize that, how can I harvest that, how can I maybe not only collect and keep that in check, but also plant back native species if I can.

BG: What do you love about connecting with plants?

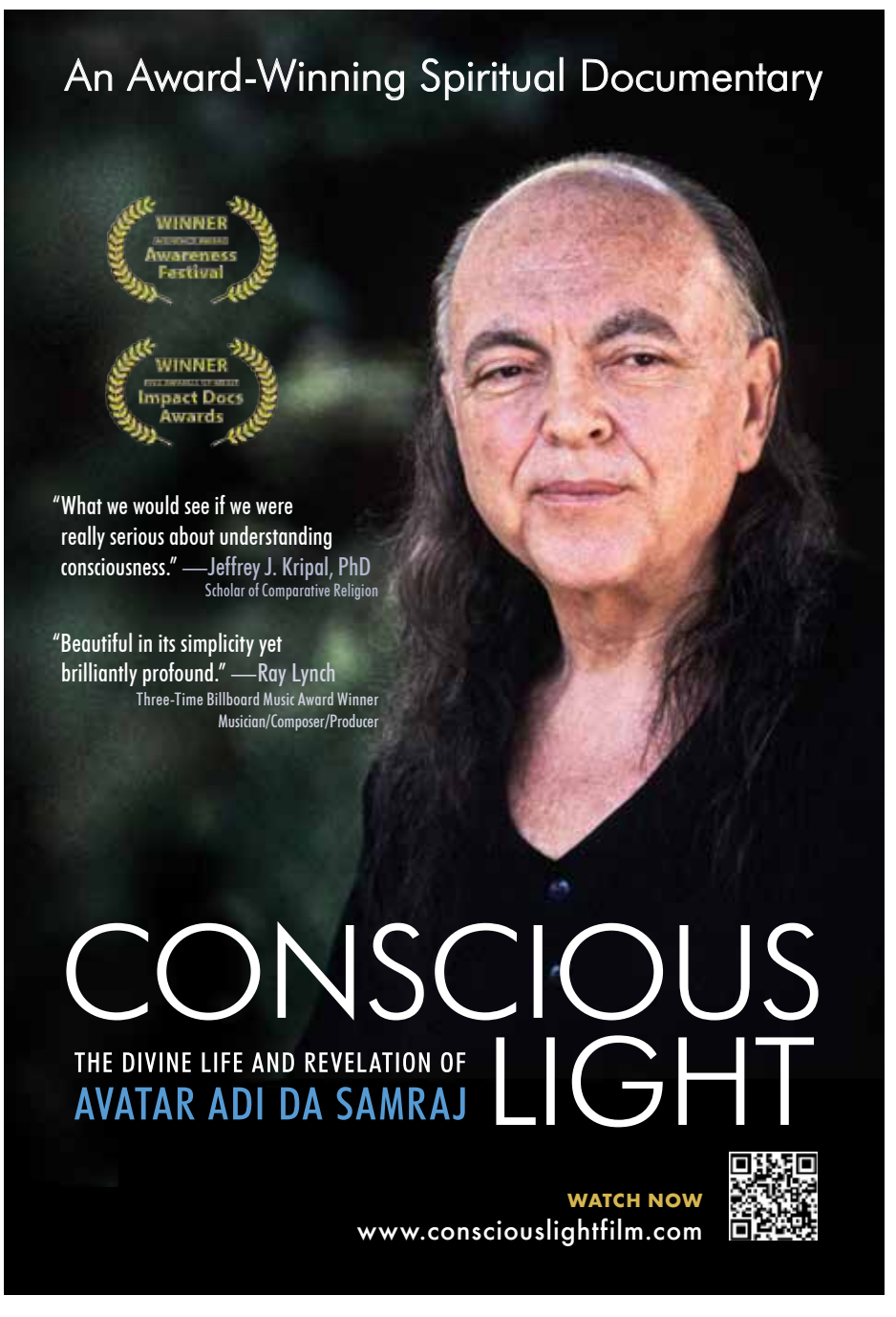
...At the beginning of the June weekend, we did the walk at Bald Mountain—and we were sitting with the sassafras and the blueberries and the wintergreen, and it just struck me in a way that was unique. I thought to myself, "I've been teaching in this exact same spot with groups of people for almost twenty years. My class, coming and sitting in this spot with these plants is a part of the cycle of this place...

JM: I just *learn* so much from plants. They've been here so much longer than us. They know what they're supposed to be doing, and they know who they are.

I remember one time—I was stopped at the interchange of 696 and I-94; it's just all concrete…a really hot day…the vehicle I was in didn't have good air conditioning, so I had my windows down…there's a ton of exhaust….really uncomfortable and humid. I looked, and in the crack—not on the side of the road, but in the expressway where all the cars were driving—was this dandelion that was flowering; and it wasn't just growing there, it was growing there *and flowering*. It was doing everything it needed to do.

Plants don't think, "Well, look at my circumstances, I can't possibly thrive and grow in these circumstances, because it's terrible." They're like, "This is where I'm at, I'm going to just live with all the vital force that I have, and be what I am." And that to me is really inspiring, because I know that I often try to do that, but then feel flustered and frustrated and thwarted and feel like, "I would be able to do this *if..*" or "I would be able to do this *if* things were more conducive." And, it's not that there isn't truth to that, but still—the plants, they just inspire me! They're beautiful.

I think, in regard to herbalism as a system of medicine, it's the most beautiful system of medicine that exists—not to disrespect flower essences or homeopathy, but jars of herbs are prettier than jars of pellets, and jars of tinctures are prettier and they smell nicer than jars of flower essences. They do take up a lot more space. They do take over your home and your cupboards and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jim mcdonald with previous students at the Great Lakes Herb Faire a few years back.

Photos on this page courtesy of Great Lakes Herb Faire.

that is something to consider about them, but when you have a jar of beautiful calendula and it's in the way, it brings you delight, and you don't resent it. You know that this is true because when you go to an herbalist's house, you want to look at their jars and they want to show you theirs. Because it's *beautiful*.

BG: It's art, medicine, life.

That's what I'm striving for—to teach something in a way that is usable and makes common sense.

JM: It's very artistic, even though there's absolutely a science to it, and there's absolutely a structure to it and different ways of utilizing it. If I see an herbalist who has a formula for something, I can look at the ingredients on the bottle and it gives me an insight into that particular person's artistic expression of how they put things together. I had a client once who moved from another city and was referred to me by their herbalist there, and they said, "I'd like to see you, but in the meantime, before we can talk, can you refill my formula?" They sent me the formula, I did have everything for it, and I said to myself, "Wow, I would have never thought to do that," and it's not because there was anything wrong with it—it was just a direction that I wouldn't have been inclined to go in.

BG: It's all kind of personal in a way.

JM: It's very personal and creative. And I think it also has to do with that person's relationship with the plants that they're using. Because I get used to how I might arrange things—I'll have it in my mind, "These plants, it's not just that their actions work together well. These plants get along well. They're friends. They would go on a road trip together." Sometimes I might think, "I want to put that in, but I don't feel I can unless I add this other thing." The very instigating herbs, the more active herbs, the herbs that are a little bit more forceful, you want to have something gentle in there to take the edge off. It's definitely a very creative and artistic expression that tells you lots about people.

I was at an event, and I saw somebody putting out bottles, and—this seems weird, but all herbalists do it—I walked over and casually picked up a couple bottles and looked at the ingredients so I could assess the person. They were talking with someone else, I wasn't able to talk to them, so I looked at their formulas as a way to figure them out. The first thing I saw was, "There's a lot of herbs in here, way more than I would ever use," and my immediate thought was it might be a shotgun formula, everything-for-everything kind of thing, but then I looked at it and realized, "Wow, that is a very clever, purposeful, well-put-together formula, and nothing is redundant," and that made me realize that this particular herbalist is a meticulous thinker. I kind of max out at five to seven herbs—once I get to seven herbs I usually start a new formula because I don't know if I can keep track of how they're all going to fit together.

BG: From the heart, on your path, and with how you fit into the greater picture—what do you hope to offer people?

JM: Kindness is important to me, integrity is important to me, and I always want that to be there. Fun is a really big part of it, too. I hope that people can come away from an interaction with a sense of empowerment and understanding things better. I hope that if I work with them regarding herbs, they don't leave thinking, "I'm supposed to take this," but instead, "I didn't just get a suggestion of herbs; I had a great time and I got an understanding of the herbs and what the reasoning is." I don't want to just give a class or consultation and tell people what to do. I want to think about it together; I'll give my perspective on it, but I want to do that in a way that is engaging and empowering so that the main action isn't following my suggestion—the main action is engaging what's going on with you in a way that makes sense, that brings you in the direction you want to go.

Like most everyone, I initially started out thinking and learning, "What herb is good for this problem?" and, "What problem is this herb good for?" Now what I think is, "What are the qualities, nature, and virtues of this particular plant?" and, "How would that be helpful or not helpful for an individual person?"

I have a lot of respect for conventional medicine, it does a lot of things that are important, and it does things that you can't do with herbalism, but the dynamic between a practitioner of conventional medicine and the people who go to see them is often a really one-sided dynamic. I think that for most of the herbalists I know, our loftiest goal would be to educate people in a way that they don't need us. I'm not just saying, "Here's what to take," but rather, "Here's a way to think about what's going on: here's a way to frame it," so that the people coming to me can learn the skill too. In traditional communities of so many different cultures, there would always be plant people—people who that was more their thing—but the community in general would have this baseline knowledge. I think a part of the reason that so much of what I do is education-based is because I want that knowledge to come back. I want people to know that there's just a whole lot of simple, safe things that they can do with the plants that grow around them, so that they might not *have* to come and see me. They can feel confident and say, "I know this, and I can teach it to my children, and my children can teach it to their friends," and it can become community knowledge again, rather than specialized knowledge. Herbalism isn't supposed to be specialized knowledge; it's supposed to be community knowledge, of which, as with anything, some people know more.

jim mcdonald—herbalist and teacher—offers regular plant walks and classes as well as his yearly eight-month-long herbal intensive course, Lindera. Although the herbal awareness he brings forward is advanced, his teaching style is so accessible and fun that the learning is easy. For more information, visit his websites herbcraft.org and herbcraft.podia.com, and make sure to check out herbcraft.org/gathering.html for essential (life-saving) safety guidelines when gathering your own herbs.

Kindness is important to me, integrity is important to me, and I always want that to be there. Fun is a really big part of it, too. I hope that people can come away from an interaction with a sense of empowerment and understanding things better.

…the plants, they just inspire me! They're beautiful.

The Michigan Medicinal Herb Supply:

The Current State and a Vision for Re-localization

By Emily Springfield

After a long day, you reach for your favorite herbs to make a soothing cup of tea: a spoonful of tulsi, a scoop of chamomile, and a pinch of peppermint… perfect! Just what you need to unwind. The fragrant brew might relax you, but did you ever wonder what went into bringing the herbs to your cup?
It turns out, your tulsi might be from India, your chamomile from Croatia, and your mint from Washington State. Just like other types of produce can come with a heavy load of "food miles," medicinal herbs can rack up "tea miles" on the way to your cup. The reasons to buy locally or regionally grown herbs are similar to the reasons to buy local food:

- reduce the environmental impact of shipping
- support the local economy
- ensure availability of supplies

Since the vast majority of herbs sold in the US come from abroad, the herbal supply chain is especially vulnerable to disruptions such as war, shipping delays, and weather. There are dozens of steps from grower to teacup, and an interruption anywhere along the chain can mean certain herbs become suddenly unavailable.

How feasible would it be to create a local supply of medicinal herbs here in Michigan? After all, many of the most popular tea and medicinal herbs can be grown here. It turns out, it's complicated. Let's take a look at the current state of the local herb scene and its biggest challenges: growing at scale, processing and distributing, cost to buyers, and risk to farmers.

Since the vast majority of herbs sold in the US come from abroad, the herbal supply chain is especially vulnerable to disruptions such as war, shipping delays, and weather.

The Current State of Medicinal Herbs in Michigan

Michigan actually has a good climate for growing dozens of useful and delicious herbs. Obviously, temperate plants like echinacea and mints grow easily here. We're chilly enough for some of the cold-area plants like schisandra, ginseng, and goldenseal. Even some tropical or Mediterranean plants can be grown here as annuals—for example, ashwagandha and licorice—given the right soil and an indoor start. And many native and naturalized plants, like nettles, raspberries, and plantain, already thrive so well they are considered "weeds" by many. Obviously, there are also some plants that we won't be able to grow well here, but there are enough varieties that thrive in this area to stock a fairly complete apothecary.

There are dozens of herbalists in the state growing and wildcrafting herbs to support some of their clients' needs and, sometimes, to sell bulk herbs, blends, tinctures, and salves to those who know where to find them. There is also one sizeable herb farm in the state, Golden Hour Herb Farm in Potterville, which sells extremely high-quality fresh and dry bulk herbs by the ounce or pound. In addition, there are several brick-and-mortar local herb shops who stock wide varieties of herbs from several sources. Bloodroot Herb Shop (Ypsilanti) and Moondrop Herbals (Grand Rapids) both source their herbs as much as possible from Golden Hour and other US-based farms, only ordering from other sources if needed. A pressing issue, however, is that there are simply not enough locally-produced herbs to fill the large–and increasing–demand for herbal medicines.

Growers Are Needed— at Scale

According to the American Botanical Council's (ABC's) 2023 Herb Market Report, Americans spent over $15 billion on herbal supplements in 2023, and the market is growing nearly 5% annually. But despite this huge market, only a very small percentage of those herbs are grown in this country—let alone this state.

Three of the most common herb suppliers in the U.S. (retail and wholesale) are Mountain Rose Herbs, Starwest Botanicals, and Frontier Co-op. They each deal in hundreds of thousands of pounds of herbs a year aggregated from large farms and distributors around the world. When I spoke to a Mountain Rose employee last year, he said that Mountain Rose "regularly hears from farmers with a hundred pounds of dried herbs to sell, but we aren't really interested unless you have 10,000 pounds to sell all at once."

To give some perspective, the "larger" farms in the U.S., such as Oshala Farm, Zach Woods Farm, Foster Farm, and Healing Spirits farm, each grow several thousand pounds of herbs each year. Pacific Botanicals is one of the largest herb farms in the U.S. with over 100 acres in production. Of these, Pacific might possibly be able to make Mountain Rose's "10,000 pound minimum" but none of the other farms could.

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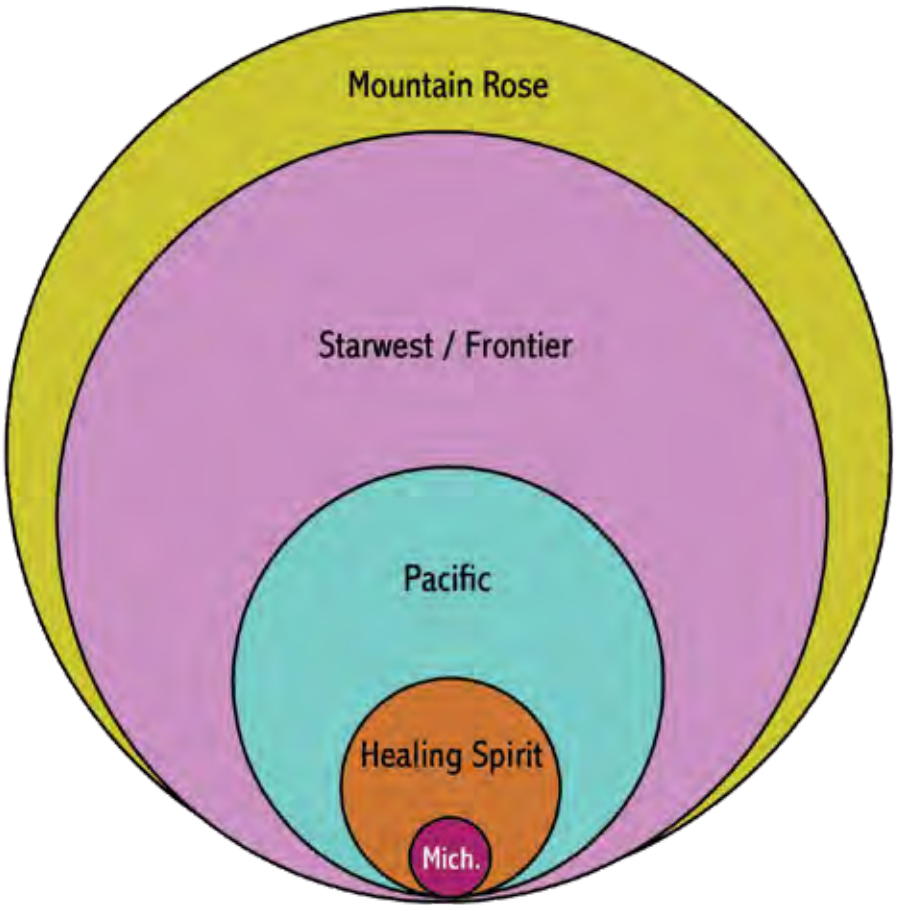
Golden Hour Herb Farm, which is currently Michigan's largest commercial herb farm, has an annual output of about 4,000 pounds per year, making them a small-to-medium size farm. The individual herbalists in Michigan who grow and forage their own herbs might only grow a few pounds each year.

All Michigan farms together sell a tiny fraction of the herbs sold by larger farms and distributors.



What Stands in the Way of a Local Herb Economy?

Since there is a lot of demand and Michigan has a good climate for growing many medicinal herbs, why aren't more people filling that niche? In short—it's incredibly difficult and risky to start a farm and rely on it for your income. The must-have list for starting an herb farm is daunting:

- Land
- Basic farm machinery, like tractors and plows
- Seeds and seed starting equipment, including a hoop house
- Harvesting equipment, from harvest hooks to special plows for harvesting roots
- Specialized drying facilities and processing screens, choppers, etc.
- Climate-controlled storage facilities and containers for finished herbs
- In addition to growing, harvesting, and processing the herbs, small-scale farmers must also maneuver marketing and commerce trends:
- Navigate complex regulations around harvest handling, farm labor, and food sales
- Develop a brand, packaging, and a web site
- Market their business to potential customers
- Manage individual orders, wholesale bulk orders, and annual pre-orders
- Continuously revise what they grow based on what grows and sells well
- Compete with lower-priced, inferior quality goods that can be shipped overnight from retail giants like Amazon

And after doing all this, like any farmer, herb farmers are at the mercy of the weather, ravenous deer, and the whims of the market.

In addition to growing, harvesting, and processing the herbs, small-scale farmers must also maneuver marketing and commerce trends.

A basic conundrum is that herbs must be grown at a certain scale to make it worth buying specialized equipment to make growing, harvesting, and processing more efficient. But you can't get to that scale without the equipment in place. So, start-up costs are high, and despite the seemingly high selling price of top-quality medicinal herbs, the return on investment is not guaranteed to be enough to cover those expenses.

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The Michigan Medicinal Herb Supply

Continued...

What Can We Do?

If we want to develop a local herbal economy, similar to the way we've developed a local food economy in the last two decades, there are individual and systematic changes that would need to happen to re-localize our herb supply.

Support Local, Regional, or National Vendors to Create Demand

As an individual consumer of herbal medicines and teas, you can make an effort to buy your products from local sources. (See the sidebar for a partial list.) Many of these places offer both "farm gate" and online sales. You can also find local herbalists selling their products at local farmers' markets and farm stores like Agricole (Chelsea) and Argus Farm Stop (Ann Arbor).

Michigan actually has a good climate for growing dozens of useful and delicious herbs. Obviously, temperate plants like echinacea and mints grow easily here. We're chilly enough for some of the cold-area plants like schisandra, ginseng, and goldenseal. Even some tropical or Mediterranean plants can be grown here as annuals...

Keep in mind, you will be working with individuals—not a multinational corporation. Your shipments will not go out within hours and arrive overnight. You will not have endless selection. You will almost certainly be able to find herbs of the same variety elsewhere for less money. But in return, you will get fresher, more vibrant, higher-quality herbs, and the satisfaction of knowing you are supporting farmers within your community.

Adjust Your Tastes and Examine Your Assumptions

Effective herbal medicines are found all around the world. We sometimes fall into the assumption that "exotic" herbs from China or India are better than local varieties because we hear them mentioned so often in discussions of the well-known herbal traditions of those areas. However, it may be possible to substitute a locally available product for something that only grows well abroad. For example, tea tree oil has become very popular as an aromatic antimicrobial agent--but locally-grown mint, oregano, and bee balm can have similar effects on some conditions. Talk with a knowledgeable herbalist to determine what substitutions could help you be less reliant of plants from abroad.

If we want to develop a local herbal economy, similar to the way we've developed a local food economy in the last two decades, there are individual and systematic changes that would need to happen to re-localize our herb supply.

New Production Model: The Herbal Cooperative

The standard model of giving up the day job, buying a farm, and going all-in on becoming an herb farmer is risky, financially challenging, back-breaking, and often heart-wrenching. Perhaps it's time to explore a new model of production. What if, instead of a few large farms, we had dozens of small farms that were also able to share equipment, knowledge, and administrative resources? This could take the form of a cooperative of small-to medium-scale part-time herb growers sharing heavy equipment and infrastructure (like a seed-starting greenhouse and dried herb storage facilities) selling under one brand name.

Farms could be widely distributed geographically and socioeconomically. For example, urban farms on a quarter acre of land could produce enough working only on weekends to provide meaningful supplemental income. If farmers share data on sales and growing plans, they could grow more of high-demand items and not glut the market with any one particular item.

Pooling resources could drastically reduce the amount of per-farm overhead and reduce the startup risks dramatically. Each farmer could focus on a few products that her land grows easily instead of trying to grow "a little bit of everything." By funneling harvests through one distributor, farmers wouldn't need to hand-fill individual orders and buyers would get a more streamlined purchasing experience. The model is more resilient, too; if one farmer needs to drop out for a year due to illness, family issues, or other crises, other farms can take up the slack fairly easily.

I will be hosting some discussions and connecting interested people with each other through 2025 with an eye to exploring the possibilities of enhancing cooperation among Michigan herb producers. If you are interested in discussing this vision further, please contact Emily Springfield at info@fenhaven.com.
Emily Springfield is a somatic wellness practitioner, small-scale herb farmer, and local food advocate based in Chelsea, Michigan. Her mission is to bring bountiful health to all through good food, good movement, and good community. Her herbs and tea blends are available through Fenhaven.com and Agricole Farm Stop in Chelsea.

Michigan Medicinal Herb Sources

- Golden Hour Herb Farm (farm – Potterville)
- Bloodroot Herb Shop (storefront - Ypsilanti)
- Moondrop Herbals (storefront - Grand Rapids)
- Global Infusion (storefront – Grand Rapids)
- Agricole Farm Stop (Chelsea – several local vendors of herbs, teas, and other products)
- Fenhaven Wellness (single herbs and blended teas)
- Chelsea Family Acupuncture (single herbs and Chinese medicine consultations)
- Woodspell Apothecary (single herbs and herbal products)

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The Sugar Shack:

How One Sweet Family Tradition Turned into an Airbnb Experience

By Cashmere Morley

It's the time of year where the wind is nipping at your winter coat and the gopher may or may not have already seen its shadow. Many Michiganders may opt to stay indoors while the final weeks of winter thaw to spring, but Kirk Coppernoll of Sugar Shack Experiences in Grass Lake insists that these are actually the proper months to tap a maple tree and sip a maple cocktail in the woods. Grab a tap, boil some sap, and meet some other nature-loving strangers as the syrup boils: this is the Sugar Shack.

The next time you drizzle a helping of store-bought maple syrup over that stack of morning flapjacks, stop and consider what's actually in that log cabin-shaped bottle. True maple syrup, says Coppernoll, has no additives—only things taken away. Making syrup is both a science and an art, honed over centuries. Coppernoll's process, passed down by his father, mirrors the ancient methods of Native Americans who harvested sap and boiled it down to syrup long before metal taps existed.

As a boy, Coppernoll would enter the woods with a simple syrup-making toolkit: a recycled milk jug, an elderberry branch he would use as a tap, a hammer, and a drill with a 7/16" bit. He notes that a hobbyist can purchase a filter system for around $50. Making syrup, he said, is as simple or as complicated as you make it. "My dad grew up on a dairy farm in Grass Lake, and he made maple syrup as a kid. They didn't have a sugar shack. All they had was a big ol' kettle. Him and his brothers would go out and boil sap."

Many Michiganders may opt to stay indoors while the final weeks of winter thaw to spring, but Kirk Coppernoll of Sugar Shack Experiences in Grass Lake insists that these are actually the proper months to tap a maple tree and sip a maple cocktail in the woods.

The Native Americans, he recalled, would cut a tongue-shaped tap in the bark of the tree, and the sap would gush into wooden barrels. They would build a red-hot fire to boil the sap in receptacles, which would steam and leave water they would then freeze off, much like Coppernoll does today.

"[The sap] comes out of the tree, and you boil it, and then you filter out the impurity. All you're doing is boiling off all the liquid concentrated into sugar, and then you're filtering out all the sediment, such as dirt and debris from the root system," said Coppernoll. "With store-bought syrup, all you're buying is corn syrup and chemicals. It has absolutely nothing to do with the maple tree." Eventually, Europeans would come in and adopt the trade from Native Americans introducing metal taps and other fixtures to help modernize the way syrup was made. When World War II hit, all of the sugar was going to the war effort, and suddenly syrup production became a hot commodity as sugar was rationed for the war effort.

Coppernoll's process hasn't changed much in the decades he's been tapping trees. When a cold snap bites into Michigan's winter months, Coppernoll knows the syrup yield will likely be a good one once spring begins to bloom.

"In the midwest, and northern Canada, is where you find sugar maples. When the ground starts to thaw, the sap, which collects in the root system, will start to produce carbon dioxide," Coppernoll explained. "As the days start to warm, the carbon dioxide expands, causing the sap to run from the root system up through the trees. You have to have a hard winter followed by a drawn out, wet, muddy spring to get a good syrup run." Last year, when Michigan winter was mild, the following spring months did not yield a good syrup run for this reason.

If venturing off in the woods to try making syrup yourself, Coppernoll says you want the nights to get down in the 20s and teens, and the days to get into the 40s; that's the sign of a good sap yield.

It takes 50 gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup. Coppernoll says other trees, such as walnut and birch, can also be tapped for syrup, but the sugar content is much lower; that's why maple is traditionally associated with syrup production. It can take 100 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of walnut syrup. Coppernoll says he processes about 1000 gallons of syrup a year at the Sugar Shack which he sells in small batches. He prefers the taste of syrup at the start of the season when the sugar content is higher. When the sap runs at the start of the season, it's crystal clear and boils down quickly because of the higher sugar content; as the season progresses, it takes on a darker color and a stronger flavor. This is because the tree pulls up sap from the root system,

and the more it pulls up, the more impurities that come with the sap, which has been sitting dormant for several months.

"There's a fine line there where you get a very assertive maple flavor into the season," says Coppernoll. "It's dark, it's robust, but then if you continue to tap too far into the season, there's a cutoff period. And you'll usually see that cutoff point in the sap; the sap will start to cloud a little bit. And I always taste it, as I gather. You're always tasting it, [through the season] because if you get some sap that's a little sour, you don't want to throw that in with some other [sweeter] sap."

Coppernoll's process hasn't changed much in the decades he's been tapping trees. When a cold snap bites into Michigan's winter months, Coppernoll knows the syrup yield will likely be a good one once spring begins to bloom.

Copernoll notes that even if you don't tap a tree, photosynthesis occurs and uses that sugar to form buds on the tree. "You're not harming the tree at all by tapping into it," says Coppernoll, "but if you do too many taps into a smaller tree, you'll definitely harm it or even kill it." He notes that a good size tree to tap is around 20" [in diameter].

Coppernoll was a mail carrier for 33 years (including delivering mail to *Crazy Wisdom*) before retiring and turning back to nature where his true passions lie. He started the Sugar Shack Experience shortly before the pandemic; sometimes his friend, Mark, will help him operate the shack, cooking waffles and other sweet treats on a wood stove, but mostly it is a one-man operation. Coppernoll's 82-year-old father, Mike, is also known to help out around the shack from time to time. Coppernoll's passion for this tradition, combined with the camaraderie it fosters, makes the Sugar Shack a unique, flavorful Michigan experience. "It's not just about syrup; it's about connecting with nature and people," he said.

When Covid hit, Coppernoll realized what a sweet experience the Sugar Shack could be, in more ways than one. Because his experience was outside, he served a very unique opportunity in being able to gather strangers together during this time.

When Covid hit, Coppernoll realized what a sweet experience the Sugar Shack could be, in more ways than one. Because his experience was outside, he realized he served a very unique opportunity in being able to gather strangers together during this time. "If we went into the Sugar Shack, we threw on a mask. But otherwise, we were outdoors, and people were just excited to be around one another again."

A sugar shack, says Coppernoll, is crucial to syrup production. When the syrup is being processed, it coats the air in a sticky residue, so Coppernoll suggests processing your syrup in a dedicated garage or shack so your "hair and clothes don't become sticky."

"There's a handful of people that kind of know the process, but they don't understand why we're doing it out here in late February and March. They ask me 'why don't you do this when it's sunny and 70?' I try to make the experience interesting; you're outside but you're also learning. I don't think a lot of people realize how much fun you can have [outdoors] in February or March."

Coppernoll loves educating people on the untapped potential of nature that's all around us.

Said Coppernoll, "When I get a full group, which is around ten people, I'll have maybe three people here, three people here, four people here, but then all of a sudden, they start interacting with each other… and that's part of the fun, for me. They're entertaining themselves, and then they're asking me questions. People start getting more involved, asking 'Hey, can we go dump these pails?', 'Do you need firewood?' It's a neutral space—no one's on their own turf. You start the experience often as strangers, but by the end, you're chatting, helping to gather sap, and stoking the fire. It builds a community. I've had many people come back several times."

Coppernoll loves educating people on the untapped potential of nature that's all around us. "I love when I hear people say, 'Oh, the pancakes were amazing. I've never tasted pure maple syrup, or watched it come out of the tree onto the pancake.' All of those experiences make this very rewarding."

To visit the Sugar Shack, look for Southern Michigan Sugar Making and schedule an experience through AirBNB, late February through early May. Coppernoll also hosts a mushroom hunting excursion, through the booking service, which begins in late April and runs through October. Coppernoll can be reached via email at mailmankirk@gmail.com, and you can keep up with the Sugar Shack on Instagram @sugar_shack_experiences.

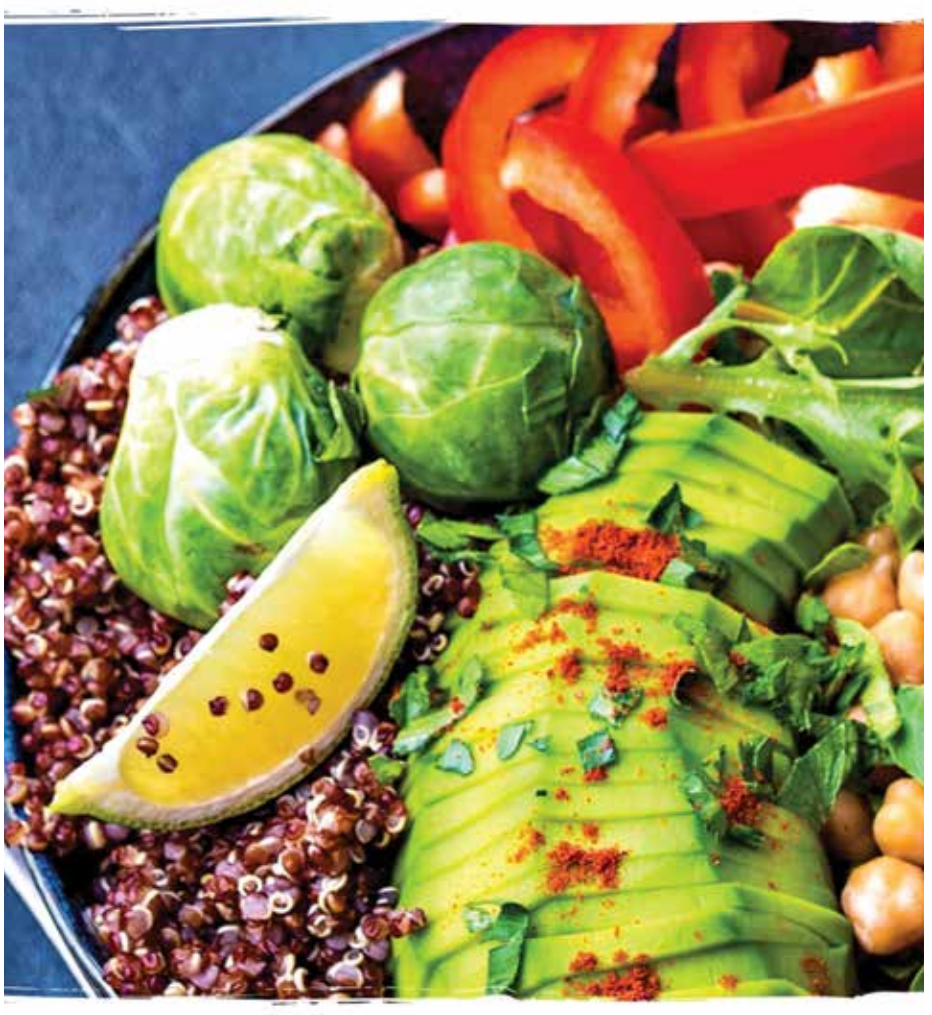
Cooking with Lisa

By Lisa Viger-Gotte

This Winter Vegetable Buddha Bowl is a nourishing, colorful meal featuring roasted sweet potatoes, Brussels sprouts, carrots, and red onions over a bed of quinoa. Topped with fresh kale and spinach, creamy avocado slices, and sprinkled with pomegranate seeds, it's drizzled with a tangy tahini dressing, offering a perfect balance of warmth, flavor, and nutrition.

Winter Vegetable Buddha Bowl Recipe

Servings: 2
Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 30-35 minutes



Ingredients:

For the Bowl:

- 1 cup quinoa (or your preferred grain like brown rice or farro)
- 1 medium sweet potato, peeled and cubed
- 1 cup Brussels sprouts, halved
- 1 large carrot, sliced into rounds
- 1 red onion, cut into wedges
- 1 red pepper, sliced
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 cup kale, chopped
- 1 cup spinach
- 1 avocado, sliced
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1/4 cup pomegranate seeds (optional, for a burst of color and flavor)
- Lemon or lime wedges

For the Tahini Dressing:

- 1/4 cup tahini
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice (or lime juice)
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2-4 tablespoons warm water (to thin the dressing)
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Instructions:

Prepare the Quinoa:
Rinse the quinoa under cold water in a fine mesh strainer.
In a medium pot, combine the quinoa with 2 cups of water and a pinch of salt.
Bring to a boil over medium-high heat.
Reduce the heat to low, cover, and let simmer for about 15 minutes, or until the quinoa is cooked and the water is absorbed.
Fluff with a fork and set aside.
Roast the Vegetables:
Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
Place the sweet potatoes, Brussels sprouts, carrots, red peppers, and red onion on a baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Toss to coat the vegetables evenly.
Roast in the preheated oven for 25-30 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender and slightly caramelized, stirring halfway through for even cooking.

Prepare the Kale:
While the vegetables are roasting, prepare the kale. Place the chopped kale in a bowl and drizzle with a little olive oil and a pinch of salt. Massage the kale with your hands for about 2 minutes until it becomes tender and slightly wilted.

Make the Tahini Dressing:
In a small bowl, whisk together the tahini, lemon juice, maple syrup, minced garlic, salt, and pepper. Gradually add the warm water, a tablespoon at a time, whisking until you reach your desired consistency (it should be pourable but not too runny).

Assemble the Buddha Bowl:
Divide the cooked quinoa among your serving bowls.
Arrange the roasted vegetables, massaged kale, and avocado slices on top of the quinoa.

Drizzle the tahini dressing over the top.
Sprinkle with pomegranate seeds, if using, for an extra burst of flavor and color.
Serve immediately while the vegetables are warm and enjoy your nourishing winter vegetable Buddha bowl! You can customize this bowl with your favorite winter vegetables and add any other toppings or proteins like chickpeas or tofu for an extra boost.

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Pumpkin Loaf is the perfect plant-based blend of cozy fall flavors! Moist, tender, and packed with pumpkin spice, it's ideal for breakfast, dessert, or a sweet snack.

Pumpkin Loaf Recipe

Ingredients:

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour (or an all-purpose gluten-free flour blend)
1 cup pumpkin puree (canned or homemade)
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup neutral flavored oil (canola works well)
1/4 cup almond milk (or any plant-based milk)
1 tsp vanilla extract
1 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp baking soda
1 tsp cinnamon
1/2 tsp nutmeg
1/4 tsp ground cloves
1/4 tsp ground ginger
1/4 tsp salt
For the Glaze (optional):
1/2 cup powdered sugar
2-3 tsp almond milk (or other plant-based milk)
1/4 tsp vanilla extract

Instructions:

Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C) and lightly grease a loaf pan. Adding a sheet of parchment to the bottom of your loaf pan and up over the sides can also help prevent sticking.
In a large bowl, mix together the pumpkin puree, sugar, oil, almond milk, and vanilla extract until smooth.

Sift the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, ginger, and salt into the wet ingredients and stir to combine. Mix until well incorporated.

Pour the batter into the prepared loaf pan and spread it out evenly. Bake the loaf for 45-50 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean.

Let the loaf cool in the pan for 10 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely.

To make the glaze, mix the powdered sugar, plant-based milk, and vanilla extract until smooth in a small bowl. Drizzle over the cooled loaf.

Serve and enjoy! This pumpkin loaf is delicious with or without the glaze and pairs perfectly with a warm cup of tea or coffee. Enjoy this cozy, plant-based treat!

Tea with Peggy

Rooibos Tea for a Healthier You

By P. A. Alaniz

I enjoyed a cup of tea long before I knew it could help me in my quest to become a healthier person. Upon discovering that something I enjoyed doing on a daily basis could actually help improve my health, I decided it was time to do some research. So, I read books about tea, attended workshops on tea, and even went to work at a tea factory to learn more about the subject. Green tea always seemed to come up first on the list for overall health benefits. Yet, after learning more about types of teas and tisanes I discovered there was an even better option. When it comes to drinking tea for its health attributes it might surprise you that green tea is not the one with the most benefits. While green tea is the healthiest among true teas, Rooibos tea contains a longer list of health properties, making it a super tea. It is also caffeine free which makes it a great alternative for people trying to stay away from caffeine.

Rooibos tea is actually a tisane. It is often referred to as African red bush tea. While it is usually found in its red and oxidized form, it can also be green. It is both antispasmodic and anti-inflammatory, which means that it promotes relaxation as well as helps to reduce pain. Its superpowers do not stop there, though. Other health benefits attributed to Rooibos are lower blood pressure, lower blood sugar levels, weight loss, reduced appetite, and has even been attributed to limiting the formation of new fat cells. If that were not enough, it has an estimated 45 to 47 percent higher antioxidants per cup than green tea, as well as being rich in copper, fluoride, potassium, calcium, and magnesium.

Rooibos, which is red in color due to the oxidation process, has notes of honey, caramel, and vanilla to it. Whereas the green rooibos tends to have more of a grassier taste similar to green tea. Because Rooibos is a tisane instead of a true tea, you can leave it to infuse for longer period in hot water without fear of a bitter taste. It pairs well with cinnamon and is great with whiskey in a hot toddy. If you prefer a more refreshing drink, add ice and gin to bring out the grassier notes to the tea. In the summer it is great iced along with a splash of either grape, apple, orange, or cranberry juice. My suggestion, since it already has vanilla notes in it, would be to try it with vanilla vodka over ice.

Rooibos Vanilla Cooler

Ingredients:

- 4 cups boiling water
- 1 shot of vanilla vodka per glass
- 2 tablespoons of Rooibos tea
- 1 cup of ice per glass

Bring water to a boil and place in the tea caddy or bag filled with rooibos tea. Let it steep for five to ten minutes. You can leave it in the water longer if you would like a stronger flavor. Once removed, allow the tea to cool in the refrigerator. After chilled, add one cup of ice per 16-ounce glass, one shot of vanilla vodka, and fill the remainder of the glass with chilled rooibos tea. Drink and enjoy!

P.A. Alaniz is a tea enthusiast. She received an MFA from Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado. She has been published by Chicken Soup for the Soul and writes regularly for her blog, Tea, Travel and Spirits.

Herbs for Your Garden: Marshmallow

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By Caitlin Potere

Are you looking for a unique, useful, and beautiful herb for your garden? Let me introduce you to Marshmallow, a hardy perennial whose every part has a use. It can grow quite tall, up to four feet, with soft fuzzy leaves and light purple flowers. This plant has many cousins in the mallow family which are planted as ornamentals. Marshmallow (Althaea officinalis) is the medicinal species that we will explore today.

Marshmallow holds a special place in herbal traditions. It's part of a small group of medicinal plants containing a large amount of mucilage, a naturally occurring polysaccharide which feels like a slippery gel. This gel soothes, moistens, and protects dry or inflamed tissues in the body. The root contains the highest amount of mucilage and is the most commonly used part of the plant. Tea made from Marshmallow can help relieve dry mouth, sore throats, and dry coughs. Its soothing benefits continue in the digestive system helping to heal inflamed tissues and offering comfort for issues such as ulcers and acid reflux. The mucilage also acts as a prebiotic fiber improving the gut microbiome.

Tea made from Marshmallow can help relieve dry mouth, sore throats, and dry coughs. Its soothing benefits continue in the digestive system helping to heal inflamed tissues and offering comfort for issues such as ulcers and acid reflux.

The delicate flowers are edible and can be used to garnish salads or homemade fresh spring rolls. They have a soft texture and no strong flavor. The leaves can be used topically to speed healing of skin irritations such as burns, bug bites, boils, and rashes. The leaves can also be used in the same way as the roots, but it's important to note that they contain less of the "slime," so the effect is milder.

Marshmallow offers a sustainable alternative to the popular herb Slippery Elm, a tree bark which has similar medicinal uses. Slippery Elm is considered an "at risk" species by United Plant Savers due to overharvesting and the impacts of Dutch Elm disease. I consider Marshmallow to be easy to grow in Michigan gardens, although it does require a couple extra steps and a little bit of planning to grow it from seed.

Marshmallow offers a sustainable alternative to the popular herb Slippery Elm, a tree bark which has similar medicinal uses.

You can direct sow Marshmallow seed in the fall or spring. Regardless of the season, it's best to "scarify" the seed first. "Scarification" involves weakening the seed coat to encourage germination. This is achieved by carefully nicking the seed with a knife or gently rubbing it against sandpaper or a nail file just until the inside shows through in one spot. This allows water to penetrate the thick seed coat. Afterwards, soak the seeds in room temperature water overnight, then sow immediately, or place them in peat moss in a plastic baggie and store it in the fridge for up to five weeks. I always find this to be a welcome project during the late wintertime when I'm eager to get my garden started.

Marshmallow enjoys moist garden soil in full sun, but it will also tolerate part shade and some dry spells. Place prepared seeds on the soil surface, barely cover with soil, and tamp securely. The seeds typically take one to two weeks to germinate. Thin to two feet apart. This plant is not very needy. You do not need to fertilize it. I've had great success just letting Mother Nature water it with rainfall. It may need additional water if planted in a sandy or dry spot. Water if it looks wilted. The plant produces ample seeds in the fall which look like little tires. Harvest them when they turn brown and hard. Leaves and flowers can be harvested in the first year by simply plucking them from the plant, but you'll want to wait until the plant is at least two years old to harvest the root. The root should be dug up in the early spring or fall of the third year. Use a garden fork to loosen the soil around the base of the plant. Once you have an idea of where the roots have spread, use a shovel to carefully excavate. Roots should be hosed off and gently scrubbed to remove dirt. Use a sharp knife to cut the root into thin slices. Lay root slices, leaves, or flowers in a single layer and use a dehydrator or screen to dry. All plant parts can be stored for one to three years, ideally in an airtight container with a food grade silica packet, away from light, heat, and moisture.

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Traditionally, Marshmallow is prepared as a water infusion ("tea"). Due to the chemical nature of the slimy polysaccharides, it is not advisable to try to make a Marshmallow tincture using alcohol. To make Marshmallow tea, use one teaspoon dried root and add eight ounces of warm water (not boiled). Steep for one hour, until slimy, and then strain and squeeze the herb to get more mucilage out. Drink one to four cups a day. The dried leaf can be put in tea blends to add a gentle soothing property that doesn't make the resulting tea overly slimy. Dried leaves can also be infused in oil to make an herbal healing salve. Fresh leaves (or rehydrated dried leaves) can be crushed and applied directly to the skin as a poultice.

A nice, rehydrating electrolyte drink can be made using Marshmallow tea. Cool the tea in the refrigerator and add a splash of lemon juice, a couple ounces of fruit juice, and a pinch of salt. In the mid-1800s, small candy stores in France began making marshmallows using the Marshmallow plant, although the tradition dates all the way back to 2000 BC Egypt. Growforagecookferment.com has a nice recipe for making your own marshmallows using Marshmallow root powder. I haven't done this yet myself, but I'm planning to!

Marshmallow root has a long history of safe use, and some herbalists even say it can be used in small amounts during pregnancy, but always check with your doctor first. The mucilage in Marshmallow can interfere with the digestion and absorption of some medications, so if you are taking supplements or medications, separate them from Marshmallow by at least an hour.

Marshmallow is fun to grow, makes a beautiful addition to your garden, and offers a variety of medicinal uses. If you would like to learn more about adding herbs to your garden, check out my free online class "Herbs for the Michigan Gardener" which covers 20 different medicinal and culinary herbs suited for the southeast Michigan garden. It's pre-recorded so you can watch at your own pace. Visit CastleRemedies.com and click on "Classes."

Caitlin Potere is an herbalist and enthusiastic Project Grow community gardener. She has been studying herbs for over a decade and has completed programs with herbalists Jim McDonald and David Winston. Potere manages Castle Remedies, a holistic pharmacy in Ann Arbor, and is also a coordinator of the annual Great Lakes Herb Faire which takes place in Chelsea, Michigan. You can contact her by email at caitlin@castleremedies.com.

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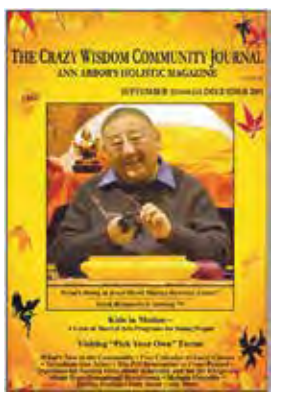

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Kids in the Community

Winter Boredom Busters

By Christine MacIntyre

When the chill of winter sets in and the days grow shorter, it's easy for kids to feel stuck indoors with nothing to do. But winter doesn't have to be boring! From exploring local spots and discovering wildlife in its winter habitat to cozying up with a good book, trying out hands-on crafts, or creating a snow-themed masterpiece at home, there's plenty to keep young minds busy and curious all season long. All it takes is a little creativity to make this frosty time of year fly by.

Winter Wildlife

Winter may seem like a quiet time in nature, but it's one of the best seasons for spotting wildlife. With bare trees and snow-covered ground, catching glimpses of animals going about their winter routines is easy. Local nature reserves and parks are great places to go birding. Keep an eye out for tracks, too—following tracks can be an exciting way to see where animals have been. Whether you're watching squirrels busily gathering walnuts hidden in fall, or hearing the distant hoot of an owl, winter reveals a hidden world of wildlife just waiting to be discovered.

Of course, there are also many ways to explore winter wildlife without leaving the house. Kids can likely spot rabbits darting through the snow or deer foraging. Asking questions about what they observe opens a window to discuss animals and how they survive in the wintertime, what animals thrive in winter, and so much more. Add to the learning by getting creative and having the kids draw what they see!

Leslie Science and Nature Center

This fantastic winter destination for kids offers a unique chance to experience nature up close even when the temperature dips below freezing. Kids can explore snowy woods and look for winter wildlife while getting some exercise on the outdoor trails. The center's live animal enclosures in the Critter House feature native frogs, turtles, snakes, and more.

The center's live animal enclosures, featuring owls, hawks, and other raptors, give kids a rare opportunity to see these magnificent creatures up close. Plus, special winter programs and interactive exhibits make it a fun, hands-on learning experience that brings nature to life all year round.

Learn more through their website, discoverscienceandnature.org/leslie-center, or call (734) 997-1553. The Leslie Science and Nature Center is located at 1831 Traver Road in Ann Arbor.

Tiny Lions Cafe

Tiny Lions Cafe is the purr-fect winter getaway for kids who love cats. With activities like Yoga with Cats, Cats & Kids, and Teen Mewvie Nights, there's always something fun happening. Younger visitors can enjoy Tiny Tails Story Time or Coloring with Kitties while aspiring animal lovers can become Junior Volunteers. It's also an ideal spot for winter birthdays with a special party program. Kids can pet and play with the resident cats and, if the cats allow, even snuggle up for a cozy cuddle. The cafe offers a self-serve snack bar with hot chocolate, coffee, and light snacks, or families can bring food and enjoy a warm, relaxing time with their feline friends.

Learn more through their website, tinylions/org, or call them at (734) 661-3530. Tiny Lions Cafe is located at 5245 Jackson Road in Ann Arbor.

Dominos Farm Petting Farm

Dazzling Christmas decorations adorn the farm creating a magical setting for a festive winter day. As you stroll through the snowy wonderland, get up close with friendly animals, from llamas to goats and cows, all bundled up in their warm winter coats. Kids will learn farm and animal facts such as how animals stay warm and thrive in winter. The lively landscape provides perfect photo opportunities as well.

You can find more information and register for special events at their website, pettingfarm.com, or by calling (734) 998-0182. Domino Farm is located at 3001 Earhart Road in Ann Arbor.

Kensington Metropark Nature Center

Visit the Kensington Metropark Nature Center for an enchanting close-up experience with winter songbirds at the Chickadee Meet & Greet. Begin indoors to discover why these feathered friends are drawn to the center along with tips to attract them to your yard. Then, bundle up for a guided stroll along snowy paths where you can spot or photograph feathered friends. This easy-going adventure is perfect for young explorersNo experience is necessary, just dress

warmly and bring a spirit of discovery! The nature center also offers exhibits and special programs throughout the year.

Learn more through their website, metroparks.com or call (810) 227-8917 for event dates and times. Kensington Metropark Nature Center is located at 4570 Huron River Parkway in Milford.

Arctic Art

Winter is the perfect time to channel creativity into artistic endeavors. The cold months offer inspiration whether it's the intricate designs of frost on a windowpane or the soft, muted colors of a snowy landscape. Kids can bring this wintry magic indoors by crafting snowflake mobiles, painting winter scenes, or building miniature snowmen out of clay. Local art studios often offer winter workshops where young artists can explore painting, pottery, or photography. For a cozy afternoon at home, DIY projects and crafts provide an opportunity to explore new hobbies. With endless ways to craft and create, winter becomes a season for artistic imagination to soar.

Whitepine Studios

Whitepine Studios is a well-liked art studio where kids can engage in several events perfect for beating winter boredom. Managing director Joanne Dence said they welcome children as young as three in their popular “Mommy and Me” workshops, held once a month on Wednesday mornings, and in their ceramic workshops offered monthly on Saturday mornings. They also host a monthly painting pARTy for kids ages five to 13, featuring a seasonal theme where kids can enjoy painting, socializing, and eating a complimentary treat. During the school year, kids can attend after-school classes that cover painting, drawing, sewing, ceramics, and mixed media with workshops designed especially for older children.

This winter, Dence said their Swiftie ornament workshop “will offer an exciting opportunity for intergenerational creativity.” The workshop is open to participants ages eight and older, including adults. Along with the special events offered throughout the year, Whitepine Studios is a great spot for birthdays welcoming kids ages four and up for fun and creativity. “Their commitment to tailoring each experience to the celebrant’s interest or party theme sets them apart,” according to Dence, as kids create one-of-a-kind projects that make each child feel special.

“We’re committed to inclusivity, providing creative opportunities for disabled kids to express themselves and enjoy art in a supportive environment,” said Dence. She reiterated the importance of every child having the chance to create and connect with others through art.

Visit whitepinestudios.org to find all their upcoming events or call (734) 330-2079. Whitepine Studios is located at 105 West Michigan Avenue in Saline.

Ann Arbor Art Center

The Ann Arbor Art Center (A2AC) offers various art classes for all ages and skill levels. Whether you’re interested in drawing, acrylic or oil painting, pottery, ceramics, jewelry, printmaking, textiles, or even digital art and graphic design, there’s a class for everyone.

Shop manager Steph Mcdonald suggested families check out Family Fridays geared toward children aged five and up. “We also have a winter workshop where people can drop in and do projects as a family,” she said. Additionally, their winter break camp is geared toward children aged five to 12.

For a full schedule and camp registration, visit annarborartcenter.org or call (734) 994-8004. The Ann Arbor Art Center is located at 117 West Liberty Street in Ann Arbor.

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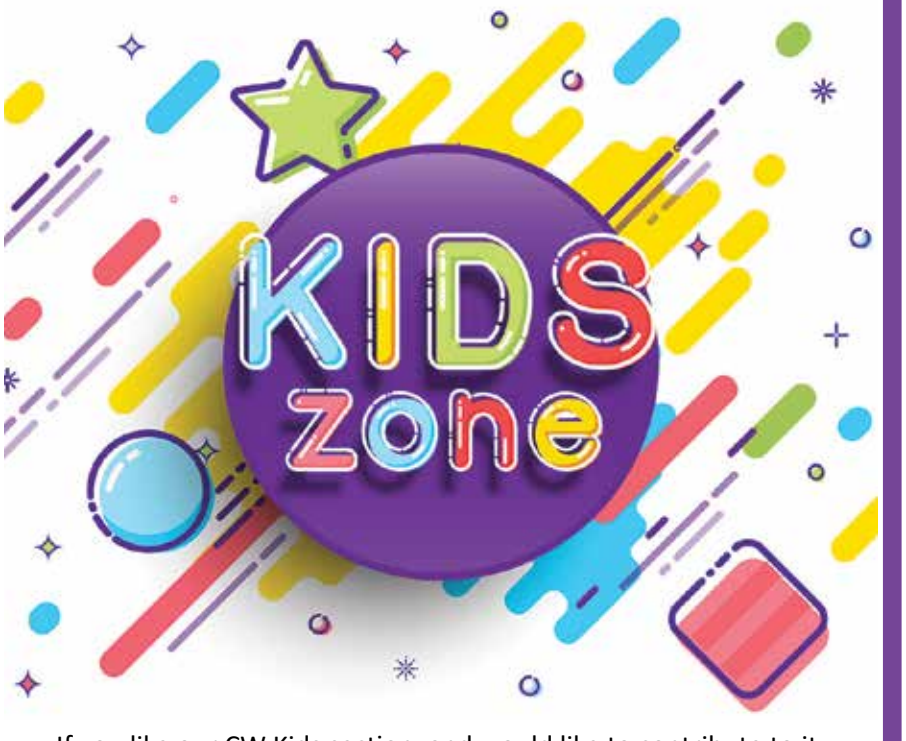
Crazy Wisdom Kids

An ongoing section of
The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal

Articles, calendar listings, advertisements, music and book reviews, and other features that focus on raising conscious and spirited kids.



If you like our CW Kids section, and would like to contribute to it, contact jennifer@crazywisdom.net.
We welcome story ideas, illustrations, feature writing, and photographs.

Kids in the Community

Winter Boredom Busters

Scrap Creative Reuse Center

Scrap Creative Reuse Center offers a fun environment to get creative juices flowing through drop-in family crafting on Saturdays, workshops, and classes. The center inspires kids to reuse discarded materials creatively through educational programs and affordable materials. Winter day camps explore abstract art and activism through art, robots, pets, space, and more while reusing discarded objects and materials. Camps are a mixture of staff-led projects and free creation perfect for educating young artists while also nurturing creative expression.

View upcoming events and camps at annarbor.scrapcreativereuse.org or call (734) 800-4137. Scrap Creative Reuse Center is located at 4567 Washtenaw Avenue in Ann Arbor.

Abrakadoodle

For a wide variety of art classes, camps, and events, Abrakadoodle is a fun option for kids of all ages. Projects prompt kids to engage in hands-on, active discovery through various materials such as paints, wire, clay, and more as they bring their ideas to life. No school mini day camps and specialty workshops are anoption for short-term fun, while art class series are stretched out over time so that kids work on step-by-step projects that build confidence through progression. From fun food art and collage making to famous faces drawing classes and mural art, kids will love spending the winter immersed in creative exploration.

Visit abrakadoodle.com/mi-wayne-county for more information, or call (734) 495-0900. The Abrakadoodle studio is located at 8016 Sheldon Center Road in Canton.

DIY Winter-Themed Crafting

Scrap Creative Reuse Center Education Coordinator Jonathan Brant suggested using corks to make ornaments and decor. "They're adaptable, readily available, and can be painted, cut, and decorated with common crafting or reuse supplies such as beads, buttons, and fabric scraps."

Encourage kids to paint what they see—outside the living room window, on a walk, or even from their favorite scene in a book. Winter offers fun scenes to paint, draw, or even collage using readily available materials and supplies. Hand or footprint art is another fun way for kids to use their imagination. With a bit of paint, hands or feet, and some blank paper, kids can turn their prints into endless things—snowmen, Santa, trees, animals, and so much more.

Frosty Folktales

Winter is the ideal season for kids to dive into the world of books and let their imaginations roam. As the snow falls outside, there's nothing quite like curling up with a cozy blanket and getting lost in an exciting story. Many local libraries offer winter reading programs that encourage kids to explore new genres and set reading goals with fun rewards to keep them motivated. Beyond reading, kids can write their winter-inspired tales, create storyboards, or even act out favorite scenes from their books. Whether it's a classic adventure, a mystery set in the snow, or a tale about animals in the wild, winter reading helps young minds stay active and creative during the chilly months.

Ann Arbor District Library

The library offers a variety of fun and engaging activities for all ages, from Tummy Time and preschool storytimes for little ones to baby playgroups and craft sessions like Slime Time and Paper Plate Woven Bowls. Teens can create custom vinyl stickers or join movie days while adults enjoy author events, cross-stitch workshops, and trivia. Events range from music and dance, 3D printing, and jewelry-making to coding, improv shows, and origami.

The library also hosts a couple of annual contests during the winter. The It's All Write Teen Writing Contest is open to three age groups in which the top three writers will receive prizes. Categories include poetry, flash fiction, and short story. Additionally, students in third through fifth grade can join the fun by entering the Write On Short Story Contest. Lazy winter days are a perfect time for kids to challenge themselves while they draft submissions for these writing contests.

To obtain a complete calendar of events, visit aadl.org or call (734) 327-4200. The Ann Arbor District Library is located at 343 South Fifth Avenue in Ann Arbor.

Belleville Area District Library

The Belleville Area District Library has a robust youth program featuring clubs like Teen Library Vibes, Teen AniManga Club, and Comic Book Club. Artist and writer workshops, a Bluey Party, family storytime, online games for kids, and homework resources help make the library a prime literacy resource in the wintertime.

To see their full event schedule and learn more about the library's services, visit belleville.libcal.com or call (734) 699-3291. The Belleville Area District Library is located at 167 Fourth Street in Belleville.

Scrap Creative Reuse Center Education Coordinator Jonathan Brant suggested using corks to make ornaments and decor.

Favorite Winter Reads

Of course, home is the perfect place to enjoy wintertime stories and books. The following titles are some of my all-time favorite picks for kids and teens for cold-weather reading. These books explore winter adventures in snowy settings, nature, survival themes, and cultural tales sparking excitement for the season.

Preschool to Early Elementary (Ages 3-7): *Stone Soup* by Jon J. Muth, *The Mitten* by Jan Brett, *Soup Day* by Melissa Iwai, *Tracks in the Snow* by Wong Herbert Yee, *Curious About Snow* by Gina Shaw, and *Sneezy the Snowman* by Maureen Wright.

Early to Middle Elementary (Ages 6-10): *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, *A World Full of Winter Stories: 50 Folktales and Legends from Around the World* by Angela McAllister, *The Polar Bear's Gift* by Jeanne Bushey, and *The Tomten* by Astrid Lindgren.

Middle Grade (Ages 8-12): *Dog Driven* by Terry Lynn Johnson, *Breadcrumbs* by Anne Ursu, *The Wolf Wilder* by Katherine Rundell, *Greenglass House* by Kate Milford, *Snow and Rose* by Emily Winfield Martin, and *The Ice Dragon* by George R.R. Martin.

Young Adult (Ages 12+): *The Giver* by Lois Lowry, *The Golden Compass* series by Philip Pullman, *Wintersong* by S. Jae-Jones, *East* by Edith Pattou, *Trapped* by Michael Northrop, *A Shiver of Snow and Sky* by Lisa Lueddecke, *Not If I Save You First* by Ally Carter, and *Frozen Charlotte* by Alex Bell.

Cozy Kitchen Creations

Winter is the perfect time for kids to discover the joy of baking. The warmth of the kitchen, the fun of mixing and measuring, and the delicious results make for cozy memories and tasty treats the whole family can enjoy.

Feast at Home

As the temperatures drop, the chilly air slows down the way scent molecules move often making indoor spaces feel fresh and crisp but a little less fragrant. Winter is the perfect time to fill the house with cozy, warm aromas by cooking or baking with kids. The scents of cinnamon, vanilla, and spices from homemade treats linger creating a comforting atmosphere that everyone can enjoy. Plus, cooking together on a chilly day is a fun, hands-on way for kids to learn and make lasting memories. Spending time in the kitchen with kids can create opportunities to introduce them to new ingredients and, possibly, a new hobby. Consider saving their favorite recipes so they can make their own recipe book complete with handwritten notes about the experience, photos, or drawings of their favorite dishes.

Sprouting Chefs

Holiday season baking classes at Sprouting Chefs offer kids a hands-on way to explore the magic of holiday treats. Young bakers will create delicious goodies such as traditional Swiss Leckerli spiced bars, buttery-glazed Raspberry Jam Thumbprint Cookies, and festive Holiday Toffee Crackers. Each child leaves with a bakery box full of their creations, ready to share with family. Sprouting Chefs also offers hands-on cooking classes throughout the year allowing kids to make age-appropriate recipes.

To learn more, visit sproutingchefs.org or call (734) 474-1006. Sprouting Chefs is located at 1532 Warwick Court in Ann Arbor.

12 Kitchen Elves Cooking School

The programs at 12 Kitchen Elves turn cooking into a fun, hands-on adventure where kids learn kitchen skills, explore food groups, and make wise food choices. Each recipe is crafted to be delicious and health-conscious giving young chefs a solid start toward lifelong wellness!

Winter offerings feature festive cookie classes where kids learn to make dough, shape it, and bake it. They can even assemble 3D Christmas trees to decorate. They also learn to work independently and in groups.

To learn more, visit 12kitchenelves.com or call (248) 759-1212. 12 Kitchen Elves is located at 115 East Lake Street in South Lyon.

Outdoor Adventures

Matthaei Botanical Gardens

Nature's beauty doesn't end with summer. Matthaei Botanical Gardens features outdoor trails that are open seven days a week year-round. However, the winter conservatory is a perfect escape from biting cold temperatures. This warm indoor space is a renowned magical oasis with vibrant flowers, fruits, and over 900 plant species, including tropical and desert plants.

Kerry Sprague, Matthaei's Marketing and Communications Manager, highlighted a couple of organized activities including "Down the River with Ezada Clover," an exhibit in the Conservatory featuring botanist Elzada's scientific contributions and connections to the natural world, and "Wonders of Water Community Art Exhibit," which highlights rivers and their stories, as well as their role in inspiration, biodiversity, and cultural connection. "These are not kid-specific but open to all ages. Everything is free and open to the public," said Sprague.

The grounds provide ample inspiration for nature journaling, exercise, birding, and reconnecting with nature while exploring winter's beauty.

Visit mbgna.umich.edu or call (734) 647-7600 for more information. Matthaei Botanical Gardens is located at 1800 North Dixboro Road in Ann Arbor.

Mt. Brighton

Keep active this winter! The American Heart Association recommends that kids ages six to 17 get at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day. For something different, check out Mt. Brighton's seasonal kid programs such as their ski and snowboard camps and multi-week ski and snowboard lessons.

To learn more about programs and lesson availability, visit mtbrighton.com or call (810) 229-9581. Mt Brighton is located at 4141 Bauer Road in Brighton.

Shredder

For family fun this winter, consider Shredder's indoor skiing and snowboarding arenas. The indoor ski hills provide the opportunity for kids of all ages to develop ski and snowboarding skills inside increasing their strength, agility, and building confidence before hitting the snow-covered slopes.

The curriculum maximizes snowsport adventures by building a strong foundation for little skiers and snowboarders. Classes range from parent-child introductory classes to classes that dig into fundamentals and technical aspects of the sport. Shredder's also has open gym time, full and half-day camps, and parents' night out. Six-week sessions include the holiday session from December through January and the Winter session from January through April. Shredder offers birthday party packages, as well, including a Standard party with gymnastics mats, bouncy forts, and sledding, or a Ski/Board party which includes skiing and snowboarding.

Shredder is located at 32543 Schoolcraft Road in Livonia. Visit their website, shredderski.com or call them at (734) 608-2981 to learn more.

Buhr Park Outdoor Ice Arena

Ice skating is a fantastic way to meet physical activity goals while offering benefits like improved balance, coordination, and joint flexibility. It also strengthens muscles and increases endurance. Plus, it's a fun way to stay active all season long! Buhr Park's Outdoor Ice Arena will be open from November 9 to March 23 weather permitting. They have skates available to rent, and the rink is also available for rental.

Call Buhr Park at (734) 794-6234 or visit a2gov.org/departments/parks-recreation for more information. The ice rink is located at 2751 Packard Road in Ann Arbor.

Rolling Hills Winter Park

Rolling Hills offers over three miles of groomed cross-country ski trails perfect for a family winter outing. With equipment rentals available when snow permits, beginners can enjoy easy, flat trails while more experienced skiers tackle varied terrain. They also offer snow tube rentals for use on the 275-foot sledding hill. There is also a nice warming space with a gas fireplace for public use near the hill.

To learn more about the winter park and rental room, visit washtenaw.org or call them at (734) 484-9676. Rolling Hills County Park is located at 7660 Stony Creek Road in Ypsilanti.

Indoor Play

Outdoor Adventure Center

Despite its name, the Outdoor Adventure Center includes several indoor activities and events. In the wintertime, kids can get the best of both worlds with events such as Nature Play: Winter. This hands-on series immerses kids in learning and discovery from how native animals adapt to the cold to what wildlife does to prepare for the snow.

At the Outdoor Adventure Center, kids can also experience archery in an introductory session, participate in indoor "snowball fights," and make holiday crafts and cards. The center is managed by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, who pack the calendar with exciting adventures and hands-on experiences.

For more information, visit michigan.gov/oac or call (844) 622-6367. The Outdoor Adventure Center is located at 1801 Atwater Street in Detroit.

Decode Escape Rooms

Escape Rooms are all the rage right now. Decode Escape Rooms features various family-friendly escape rooms including Around the World in 80 Days, The Aurora Society, and Drive-In Adventure.

"Decode offers five unique adventures that transport players out of their everyday lives and into worlds beyond their imagination," said Decode co-owner Patton Doyle. Participants can dive into a world of mystery, puzzles, and pure adrenaline through interactive experiences that puts teamwork and problem-solving skills to the test. Here's how it works: groups are "locked" in a themed room—think magical libraries, secret compartments, and hidden doors—and have just 60 minutes to find clues, solve intricate puzzles, and "escape" before time runs out. Doyle emphasized that the escape rooms aren't scary. "We attempt to build spaces that folks want to stay in, rather than get out of! Like a Paris Street!"

For an even more unique experience, Decode's drive-in adventure lets you solve mysteries from the comfort of your own car by driving to a designated area where you're given a series of clues, puzzles, and narrative-driven challenges that unfold around you. Through physical and digital clues—like interacting with themed props outside your car, scanning QR codes, or communicating with virtual "characters" on your phone—you work together to unravel the story.

Each room is uniquely designed with immersive props and challenging riddles making Decode a favorite for thrill-seekers, puzzle lovers, and anyone looking for a brain-teasing way to bond with friends or family. The Ypsilanti location features an exclusive game called "The Aurora Society" which is a secret society whose magic is fueled by the Aurora Borealis. Players complete puzzles and solve mysteries for initiation. Once you become a member of the society, different guilds allow you to explore even more storylines and puzzles.

For more information, call (313) 438-8054 or visit decodedetroit.com/. Decode Escape Rooms has two locations - 3170 Packard Road in Ann Arbor and 16 North Washington Street in Ypsilanti.

Pinball Pete's

Pinball Pete's is the ultimate throwback for anyone who loves the excitement of arcades with a bit of retro flair. For kids, it's a thrilling adventure into an iconic Ann Arbor business filled with pinball machines, vintage arcade games, and air hockey tables. The neon glow of the games, friendly competition, and a lively atmosphere will keep kids busy for hours this winter.

This beloved local hangout and must-visit has been an area staple since the early 1980s, a time when arcades were at their peak and coin-operated games were everywhere. Originally part of a chain of arcades, it's one of the few that managed to survive holding strong as a go-to for generations of gamers and students. Over the years, it's maintained its vintage charm while adding a few modern games into the mix. Its history is as vibrant as its flashing lights—a place where locals and visitors have made memories, making high scores, and playing everything from Pac-Man to pinball.

For hours and more information, visit pinballpetes.org or call them at (734) 213-2502. Pinball Pete's is located at 1214 S University Avenue in Ann Arbor.

YMCA

Staying physically active is essential, especially during the winter months when it can be more challenging. Kids require regular physical activity making the YMCA a fantastic option for fun and exercise. The Ann Arbor YMCA offers a wide array of fitness, athletic, and social programs for children including sports, dance, gymnastics, swimming, and more. During the school year, they provide an Out of School Time "Camp" which serves as a great resource for working parents on days when kids are off from school, such as during inclement weather.

The Teen Center offers programs specifically designed for teens providing a healthy environment to keep them busy and engaged. "The Teen Center acts as a space for young adults to explore their creativity and interests while building friendships and community," said Heather Leszcynski, Chief Development and Engagement Officer at the Ann Arbor YMCA. The center is intended for teens ages 12 to 16 and functions as both an after-school drop-in and a venue for various programs. Leszcynski explained that teens can come play air hockey and ping pong, use the Nintendo Switch, create crafts, or simply hang out and enjoy some free snacks. "We see teens come with their friends, but they make a lot of friends, too!"

Babysitting classes are popular with teens and are offered throughout the year. These classes are not only fun but also productive. Additionally, older kids seeking a beneficial camp experience can join the AGQ Winter Leadership Camp designed for teens ages 13 to 15 who want to hone their leadership skills.

Leszynski highlighted that the Y provides a program called Kids Night Out at various times throughout the year. The program is a fun and affordable childcare option that gives parents some much-needed time for themselves. "As always, we offer after-school care and daycare…and we have lots of sports and swimming for youth and adults."

To learn about the Ann Arbor YMCA and all they have to offer, visit annarborymca.org or call (734) 996-9622. They are located at 400 West Washington Street in Ann Arbor.

We Rock The Spectrum (Kids Gym)

This is a play place with a purpose! The indoor place space offers classes for children with special needs as well as typically developing children. Their sensory-safe equipment and classes are specially designed to encourage play with a purpose which encourages exercise and stimulation of the seven senses through positive physical, emotional, and social development. Owner Robin Hall said, "movement-based activities are important for all kids but particularly those on the spectrum who are sensory seeking." She said We Rock The Spectrum helps facilitate this in a safe and inclusive indoor environment, no matter the weather. Ongoing events include Messy Mondays, Toddler Tuesdays, Try-It Thursdays, and Open Play to name a few.

To learn more, visit werockthespectrumannarbor.com or call (734) 623-9422. We Rock The Spectrum Kid's Gym is located at 4370 Varsity Drive Suite A in Ann Arbor.

Ann Arbor Civic Theatre

Winter is an exciting time for kids to step into the spotlight and experience the magic of performing arts. For example, *Frozen Jr.* is coming to the Ann Arbor Civic Theatre in March. Auditions begin in January. The theatre offers education and performance opportunities, such as Auditioning for Musicals: Junior Theatre, where young actors learn fundamental musical skills, such as singing, facial expression, and music.

Learn more about the theater at a2ct.org or by calling (734) 971-2228. It is located at 1226 Murfin Avenue in Ann Arbor.

Endless Possibilities for Winter Boredom

Additional ideas for boredom-busting winter fun include:

- Catch a show at the Michigan Theatre.
- Glide down the slopes at Rolling Hills County Park.
- Engage in a multi-sensory candlelight concert at Frutig Farms or First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor.
- Fight off the winter blues at the Ann Arbor Folk Festival.
- Audition for an operetta like *H.M.S. Pinafore* or sit back and enjoy performances, including *The Sorcerer*, at the Lydia Mendelssohn Theater.

Arctic Coliseum, Inc.
Learning to skate is a healthy mix of fun and challenge for kids at the Chelsea Skating School. Skaters come to the Arctic Coliseum for class where they can learn in a safe environment. Classes range from introductory levels to more advanced.

"What is so great about the Arctic Coliseum is we have a program for everyone," said Megan Salamon, program director of the Chelsea Figure Skating Club. Many options range from figure skating, which offers recreational and competitive skating for all ages, to house and travel hockey teams. "We have learn-to programs for both [figure skating and hockey]." She added that DJ Skates are an option for weekend fun, complete with disco lights and music.

To view ice schedules and learn more about figure skating or hockey opportunities, visit arcticcoliseum.net or call (734) 433-4444. Arctic Coliseum is located at 501 Coliseum Drive in Chelsea.

BIGGBY® COFFEE Ice Cube- Ann Arbor
This multi-purpose, 155,000 square-foot sports facility is packed with boredom-busting fun. With three ice rinks, a public fitness center, cafe and deli, and arcade, kids will have no problem staying busy for hours. BIGGBY® COFFEE Ice Cube houses the Ann Arbor Figure Skating Club which offers lessons in the fundamentals of skating to ages three through adult. For kids interested in hockey, they offer programs ranging from a rookie program for ages four to six and 6U and 8U cross ice program for ages four and older to travel and elite programs. They also offer adaptive skating classes for children and adults with disabilities. Families can hit the ice together during family open skating sessions. This is a budget-friendly, fun activity for kids and families of all skill levels.

For more information, visit biggbycoffeeicecube.com/ann-arbor or call (734) 213-1600. BIGGBY® COFFEE Ice Cube- Ann Arbor is located at 2121 Oak Valley Drive in Ann Arbor.

No matter your budget, or whether you enjoy being indoors or out, there are plenty of things to do when the temperatures dip below freezing and snow blankets the ground. When boredom sets in, don't forget about the ample opportunities available nearby for kids to explore nature, stay physically active, and get creative juices flowing. At home, take advantage of the cozy time spent together with kids, whipping up a new recipe, reading a book together, or learning a new skill.

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The Crazy Wisdom Kids Section

Our Book Picks for Kids and Tweens

Ten Beautiful Things
By Molly Griffin, illustrated by Maribel Lechuga

Lily and her grandmother search for ten beautiful things as they take a long car ride to Iowa and Lily's new home with Gran. At first, Lily sees nothing beautiful in the April slush and cloudy sky. Soon though, Lily can see beauty in unexpected places, from the smell of spring mud to a cloud shaped like a swan to a dilapidated barn. A furious rainstorm mirrors Lily's anxiety, but as it clears Lily discovers the tenth beautiful thing: Lily and Gran and their love for each other. Ten Beautiful Things leaves the exact cause of Lily's move ambiguous, making it perfect for anyone helping a child navigate change, whether it be the loss of a parent, entering or leaving a foster home, or moving.

Dinosaur Lady: The Daring Discoveries of Mary Anning, the First Paleontologist
By Linda Skeers illustrated by Marta Álvarez Miguéns

Mary Anning loved scouring the beach near her home in England for shells and fossils. She fearlessly climbed over crumbling cliffs and rocky peaks, searching for new specimens. One day, something caught Mary's eye.
Bones. Dinosaur Bones.
Mary's discoveries rocked the world of science and helped create a brand-new field of study: paleontology. But many people believed women couldn't be scientists, so Mary wasn't given the credit she deserved. Nevertheless, Mary kept looking and learning more, making discoveries that reshaped scientific beliefs about the natural world. Educational backmatter includes a timeline of Mary Anning's life and lots of fantastic fossil facts!

Ghost Town Treasure Hunt
By Abbi Lee

When his best friend moves away, eleven-year-old Layton Clark wonders if he'll ever have another adventure. Then he meets Sherry. She introduces him to the treasure-hunting world of geocaching. A contagious thirst for adventure sends them hunting for mysterious geocaches popping up in random places-like an abandoned Kansas ghost town. Layton and Sherry must work together to unlock the clues in the strange geocaches, solve a 100-year-old mystery to clear a dead man's name, and convince Layton's archaeologist father the town is worth studying further so his family doesn't have to move. With everything he holds dear at stake, Layton can't afford to leave a single headstone unscrubbed or geocache treasure undiscovered.

Alone
By Megan E. Freeman
When twelve-year-old Maddie hatches a scheme for a secret sleepover with her two best friends, she ends up waking up to a nightmare. She's alone—left behind in a town that has been mysteriously evacuated and abandoned. With no one to rely on, no power, and no working phone lines or internet access, Maddie slowly learns to survive on her own. Her only companions are a Rottweiler named George and all the books she can read. After a rough start, Maddie learns to trust her own ingenuity and invents clever ways to survive in a place that has been deserted and forgotten. As months pass, she escapes natural disasters, looters, and wild animals. But Maddie's most formidable enemy is the crushing loneliness she faces every day. Can Maddie's stubborn will to survive carry her through the most frightening experience of her life?

Song of the Six Realms
By Judy I. Lin

Xue, a talented young musician, has no past and probably no future. Orphaned at a young age, her kindly poet uncle took her in and arranged for an apprenticeship at one of the most esteemed entertainment houses in the kingdom. She doesn't remember much from before entering the House of Flowing Water, and when her uncle is suddenly killed in a bandit attack, she is devastated to lose her last connection to a life outside of her indenture contract.

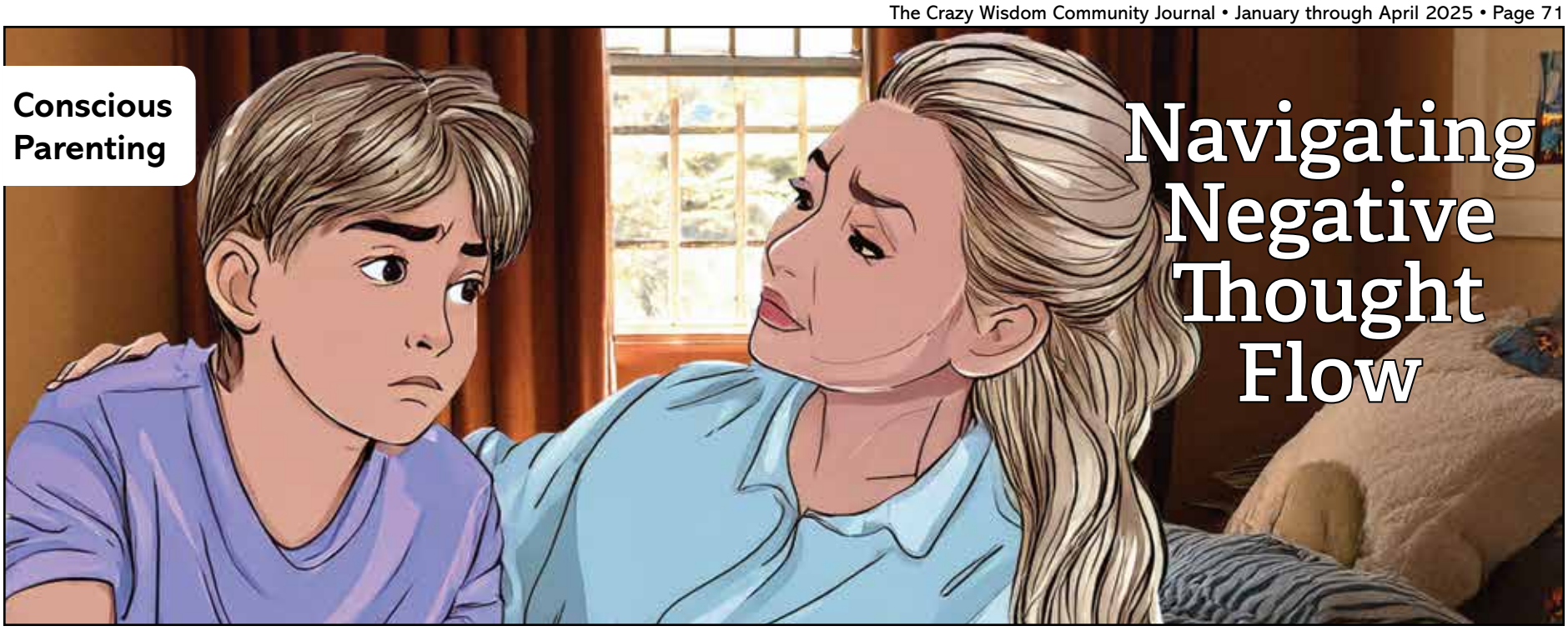
With no family and no patron, Xue is facing the possibility of a lifetime of servitude playing the qin for nobles that praise her talent with one breath and sneer at her lowly social status with the next. Then one night she is unexpectedly called to the garden to put on a private performance for the enigmatic Duke Meng. For a young man of nobility, he is strangely kind and awkward, and surprises Xue further with an irresistible offer: serve as a musician in residence at his manor for one year, and he'll set her free of her indenture.

But the Duke's motives become increasingly more suspect when he and Xue barely survive an attack by a nightmarish monster, and when he whisks her away to his estate, she discovers he's not just some country noble: He's the Duke of Dreams, one of the divine rulers of the Celestial Realm. There she learns the Six Realms are on the brink of disaster, and incursions by demonic beasts are growing more frequent.

The Duke needs Xue's help to unlock memories from her past that could hold the answers to how to stop the impending war… but first Xue will need to survive being the target of every monster and deity in the Six Realms.

You may purchase these books at shopcrazywisdom.com

Conscious Parenting



Navigating Negative Thought Flow

By Trish Maley

"I don't really like myself," my teen blurted out in the middle of a seemingly mundane conversation we were having last week.

He tightened his lips to hold back emotion.

I paused, as I noticed my jaws clench.

Surprised by what he declared, I felt my eyes stinging as salty tears began to trickle into my eyes.

My heart felt heavy, longing to simply scoop him up into my lap like I did when he was young, soothing him with kisses on his soft forehead.

As we unpacked the comment he made, I realized he was getting caught up in thoughts. Most importantly, listening to his inner critic and allowing it to lead him.

My son abruptly left the kitchen and went into his own room, shutting the door. At first, I felt as though I waited too long to respond, but I gave him some space, then joined him.

I found him curled up in his bed.

I sat on his bed with him, resting my hand on his leg. As we unpacked the comment he made, I realized he was getting caught up in thoughts. Most importantly, listening to his inner critic and allowing it to lead him.

I shared that all of us, including adults, have these thoughts of not enough: not good enough, not smart enough, not attractive enough, the list goes on.

I praised him for noticing the negative, inner voice as that is the first step of navigating a harsh inner critic. The second step is to interrupt the negative thought flow.

I explained to my son that there were different ways to do this, and it was best to experiment with different strategies to see what works.

One strategy to interrupt negative thought flow is to question it.

For example, is the thought true?

"Is it true that my friend is not texting me back because they are upset with me?"

One strategy to interrupt negative thought flow is to question it.

Another question when you catch yourself spinning in negative thought, is to ask, "is this thought serving me?"

Is it serving me to compare myself to a group of kids at school?

In one of my mindfulness meditation classes, Jack Kornfield shared a story about his teacher Ajahn Chah.He said a small group of them were walking in the countryside with Ajahn Chah. Chah asked, "See that big boulder over there in the field? Is it heavy?" The group replied, "yes."

"Not if you don't pick it up," said Ajahn Chah.

This story reminded me that at times thoughts can feel so heavy, questioning them isn't enough to interrupt them.

I decided to try a physical strategy with my son.

I took him outside by our wood pile where we have a few cinder blocks. I asked him to think of the most predominate negative thought he had. When he had it, I asked him to pick up the cinder block.

"Do you feel how heavy it is?" I asked him.

He smiled and nodded yes.

I told him to walk around with it.

"Do you feel how limited you are in what you can do when you are holding the cinder block? You can't use both of your hands to complete a task, you cannot run as fast, right?"

My son agreed.

I shared that it's normal to pick up thoughts that do not serve us or perpetuate limiting beliefs about ourselves. But none of us must carry them.

"The cinder block is the negative thought; how do you want to get rid of it?" I asked.

I thought he was going to set it down, but he actually threw it as far as he could. He then ran after it, picked it up and threw it again. It shattered into pieces.

The smile on his face as he walked toward me, free of the cinder block, was heartwarming.

I asked him to put his hand on his heart, to feel it beating, and take a few slow, deep breaths.

I took him outside by our wood pile where we have a few cinder blocks. I asked him to think of the most predominate negative thought he had. When he had it, I asked him to pick up the cinder block.

I find this is a quick way to get kids (and adults) embodied and help them breathe slowly in and out.

Pairing embodiment and deep breathing together is a great way to bring regulation to a person's nervous system.

To recap, this is the mindful concoction my son used to release a flow of debilitating, negative thoughts:

- Question the thought
- A physical strategy
- Embodiment
- Deep breathing

Thoughts can serve us in amazing ways, but they can also constrict us. The simple act of noticing or having awareness of negative thoughts coming in, and then inserting a strategy, such as questioning it, can start the process of freeing ourselves from our thoughts in any circumstance.

Trish Maley is a graduate of University of California's Greater Good Science Center as a Mindfulness Meditation Teacher. Maley facilities group and private meditation counseling for adults and children. She also works with middle school and high school athletes to improve focus and emotional regulation. Her business, Embracing Stillness, is on TikTok and their handle on Instagram is Embracingstillnesswithjoy. To contact Maley email twmaley@gmail.com.

THE NEUTRAL ZONE:

A Bright Place for Our Brilliant Young People

Story and Photos by By Hilary Nichols

We have all seen the brightly painted portico and cheerful murals on the impressive brick building downtown Ann Arbor and wondered, "What is this place?" The Neutral Zone was founded in 1998 by teens, and for teens, with a simple yet profound mission: to create a safe space for youth in Ann Arbor. Simple, maybe, but not static.

Programming here has grown and expanded in so many directions it is difficult to detail all the offerings they provide. Over their 25 years, the organization has evolved into a transformative hub of arts and leadership training that supports the growth and development of young people in an environment of their own making where they can authentically belong and thrive.

THE NEUTRAL ZONE WAS FOUNDED IN 1998 BY TEENS, AND FOR TEENS, WITH A SIMPLE YET PROFOUND MISSION: TO CREATE A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUTH IN ANN ARBOR.

It is clear there is a passionate leadership team at the Neutral Zone. I spoke with Executive Director Lori Roddy to learn more about the energy that ignites this space. Roddy interned at the Neutral Zone in 2003 as part of her University of Michigan School of Social Work degree and stepped into a program director position after graduation. Her unwavering commitment, combined with her capacity to continually adapt and innovate, perfectly reflects the organization's ethos. "It is the voices and hearts of teens that created this space," she shared emphasizing the fundamental role of the young leaders in shaping all of Neutral Zone's offerings.

The initial concept behind the Neutral Zone was born from the desire of local youth and adult community members to create a safe under-age venue for weekend events. "The story goes, young people really needed a space," said Lisa Dengiz, the initial founder of Neutral Zone. Her daughter, Emily Dengiz and friend DiOnna Jordan, wrote the initial grant. . The Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation Youth Council granted $7000 in 1998. "That's not a lot," Dengiz laughed. "It began as a 'teen center without walls' along with library events but there was a need for a physical space to really empower the youth voice. And the Neutral Zone was really carving that out in the early years. I think that is a really important story."

"At first people wanted to define this space, thinking this was for disadvantaged youth, or struggling kids, or the gifted students," Dengiz shared. "But we were clear that this place was for all sorts of kids, from every description and every interest." Initially the site was called the Teen Center of Ann Arbor. "The teens here wanted a place away from their school's cliques and clubs. So, they renamed it the Neutral Zone," John Weiss, Director of Strategic Initiatives said. "This became a place for all the kids from all sides of town to claim as their own." The calendar is now full weekdays and weekends with events and weekly classes led in the model of youth/adult partnership that is at the crux of the Neutral Zone's revised mission statement.

When the necessity for an update to their 2006 mission statement became clear, they gathered teens, staff, and advisors. Roddy shared, "Youth today seek a space where they can authentically show up as themselves in a community that affirms their power. And, they need support and resources to navigate the structures and systems that too often serve as barriers." After several rounds of conversation, the Neutral Zone launched their modern mission statement that is reflective of today's youth. "Neutral Zone is a transformative, youth-driven community where youth embrace their power, ignite their creativity, and launch their future to build equity, justice, and collective liberation."

When asked what he is most proud of, Weiss was swift to redirect the question. What excites him "is that the Neutral Zone is driven by young people's interests, ideas, and passions." The adults here cast themselves as supports—not drivers. "We create a space to allow their [kids'] brilliant minds to matter and see what they come up with and what they are interested in—that is what excites me." Weiss continued, "And that they invite old people like me to share that with. I

"AT FIRST PEOPLE WANTED TO DEFINE THIS SPACE, THINKING THIS WAS FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH, OR STRUGGLING KIDS, OR THE GIFTED STUDENTS, BUT WE WERE CLEAR THAT THIS PLACE WAS FOR ALL SORTS OF KIDS, FROM EVERY DESCRIPTION AND EVERY INTEREST."

–LISA DENGIZ OF THE NEUTRAL ZONE

think there aren't enough adults in their worlds that spend the time to find out what young people are interested in and to offer the scaffolding to let them do what they can competently do. They just need adult partnership to resource their visions."

These teens aren't surprised by the level of respect they are afforded here. Weiss said, "That's a testament to the space created here that is so welcoming in small and big ways. That is just the vibe of The Neutral Zone, and it is what they have come to expect here."

Sixteen-year-old August Peltier arrived with his electric guitar on his shoulder when he visited the Neutral Zone for the first time. "It was awesome," he reported of his first visit to the Little Jams program at the Neutral Zone. The Neutral Zone partners with Little Bands Music School for Little Jams that puts young musicians of all levels together to jam. "I got there a little early, and it was a very welcoming community. I just chilled out and ate the food they had for everyone."

The Neutral Zone serves warm meals and snack items throughout the day in their open kitchen zone. The center understands that teens can eat. Providing meals has been one of their provisions since the beginning. "We understand that some families struggle to keep up with these growing appetites. If we can soften that need—even a little—we know we are providing a service that reaches not just the teens but the community that supports them too. Our food budget is written into our grants. It is that important," said Roddy.

LORI RODDY

NEUTRAL ZONE'S MUSIC PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT IS DEEP, WITH DJ INSTRUCTION, BEAT PRODUCTIONS, PODCASTING, AND OPEN STUDIO TIMES. THEY TEACH PARTICIPANTS AUDIO ENGINEERING SKILLS WHERE THEY CAN DISCOVER AND SIGN FELLOW TEEN MUSICIANS THEN RECORD, PROMOTE, AND SELL THEIR ORIGINAL MUSIC.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
ESH SCHADEN, JORDAN OTTO, AND ZOEY GREKIN

THE NEUTRAL ZONE *continued...*

"Food is a cultural focal point. When we get to feed our community, and speak to them, and hear about their days, they feel cared for and they feel seen," Daniel Bigham, the program coordinator at Neutral Zone elaborated. Bigham was a teen participant since their humble first headquarters on Main Street competing with their award-winning Volume Youth Poetry Project. He returned as a volunteer before becoming a program director in 2016. "There is a spiritual and emotional element to connecting through food. And there is a more practical purpose." The Neutral Zone opens at 2:30 p.m. "After a full day at school, these young people arrive a little hangry. Food just adds to the morale."

"After waffles and sausages, we had a little circle up thing where we said our names and pronouns and talked about stuff," continued Peltier. "There were prompts to get everyone to be open and share."

THE NEUTRAL ZONE SERVES WARM MEALS AND SNACK ITEMS THROUGHOUT THE DAY IN THEIR OPEN KITCHEN ZONE. THE CENTER UNDERSTANDS THAT TEENS CAN EAT. PROVIDING MEALS HAS BEEN ONE OF THEIR PROVISIONS SINCE THE BEGINNING.

Neutral Zones programming may be subtle, but it is pervasive. Getting young people to share their voices is not always easy, but that's the point. Every effort is layered with impact. Their Youth Driven Spaces (YDS) approach is weaved into their programming throughout. The Neutral Zone website states, "YDS nurtures youth-adult partnerships through dynamic practices for youth and their adult allies as they build cultures to amplify and revere youth voice and decision making, tapping into teens' intrinsic motivation, and supporting young people's developmental needs to foster genuine partnerships between youth and adults."

SKYE LEWIS AND ELIJAH LAWLER

AUGUST PELTIER

The youth director of "Little Jams," Esh Schaden said, "Anyone is welcome. They can play really well or be brand new and just pick up the tambourine or drums. Just come play. It will be fun," Esh affirmed. At the Neutral Zones annual fundraiser "NZ Engage" held in November, teens hosted their own tables to pitch their programs at this gala event. Local politicians, supporters, parents, and community members enjoyed food, drink, speeches, and entertainment while being encouraged to visit each pitch table. Nine teams of teen artists, poets, musicians, and activists made their impassioned proposals. Esh made a plea toward funding their musical instrument drive. "We need working gear and access," Esh informed the crowd. "We want to spend a lot more time making music, not repairing the instruments. Our goal is to create a community in Ann Arbor where teens from all over can come and play music together because there are not enough free places for teens to experience themselves as musicians."

Elijah Lawler found the Neutral Zone a few years ago. As part of the Community High School jazz band, he was looking for a place to practice. "I saw that the Zone is really big on music. So, I decided to come down here and try to perfect my craft." Lawler is a high school percussionist playing at a professional level having joined the stage with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and at the Ark. "It takes a lot of time, so I had to sit in there and explore, to explore my creativity. I have a lot of great memories in the Studio. It is a really great experience. I don't take this welcome lightly. I love coming around here all the time."

Neutral Zone's music production department is deep, with dj instruction, beat productions, podcasting, and open studio times. They teach participants audio engineering skills where they can discover and sign fellow teen musicians then record, promote, and sell their original music.

"The new podcasting project is my baby," beamed Dani Darling from inside a state-of-the-art broadcasting booth. Darling is the Program Coordinator, and Curator of the Artist in Residence program at the Neutral Zone. "We are

amplifying the importance of youth voices. Here they get to present what is important to them through music, podcasting, spoken word, sharing their opinions, and expressing what they are thinking about to a greater audience." For their October show they needed haunting special effects. "We wanted them to access, edit, and add in their own special effect sound clips, so they have all the skills from soup to nuts."

Teens book 15-minute time slots in the recording booth. "We ask what they have in mind," Dani Darling explained. "When they aren't quite ready to go straight into the booth, we let them work with Kyler Wilkins first. He is an incredible artist." Wilkins, a successful beat maker and performing musician, is on the Neutral Zone staff (See the feature on Wilkins on page 12). He offers vocal technique to prepare the artists to fine-tune their pieces. Darling's face lit up with a huge smile. "We prepare the teens for a professional sound studio experience., letting them know what to ask for, what to say, the proper verbiage, and what is expected of them. We are teaching them how to *studio*."

The programming has continued to branch out and fine tune to meet the specific needs and wishes of their youth community. "What really inspired me about this group of teens are their innovations," Program Director Hananiah Wiggins told me. "The Riot youth team realized they have a lot of neurodivergent youth that want to join in, but they are not comfortable in such a loud and over stimulating space. So, the team pitched the idea of building a muted space for them to be here but in the way that they want to be." Their Riot Youth, LGBTQIA+ activism and social support group has grown exponentially under Wiggan's care. This year they collaborated with PRIDE ZONE (operated by Ozone House) to host a Winter Ball in December. "It was their desire to have a quiet space at both the upcoming Winter Ball and the Pride Prom where they have a little space to go to—where they can still be a part of the event but on their own terms. This screams "inclusion," Wiggins said. "I didn't know that this was everything I ever wanted until I found it. Now four years later I am the program director, and I am going to be here for a long time." Wiggins added, "These teens were asked to look at a problem and figure out a solution. And they did just that to serve their community."

"I love working at Neutral Zone," Trevor Stone, a program manager, shared. "Because it's a value-aligned team that intentionality fosters an inclusive community. It's really inspiring to see the youth blossom into leadership roles.

AS IF THAT IS NOT ENOUGH, LEADERSHIP ASSESSED THEIR DESIRED IMPACT AND REALIZED THAT YOUTH DOESN'T END WHEN A STUDENT TURNS 18... THE REACH OF NEUTRAL ZONE STRETCHED AGAIN AS THEY LAUNCHED FUTURE CORPS. THIS JOB AND TECHNICAL TRAINING PROGRAM FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADS, AGED 18 TO 24, HELPS TO IDENTIFY PATHWAYS TOWARD SUCCESSFUL ADULTHOOD.

Many teens leave the Neutral Zone with a bigger, more confident sense of self."

The adult directors at Neutral Zone have a lot to be proud of, but their graduates say it best. "I wouldn't be who I am without the zone," stated Sterling Field, now a Senior Research Specialist at Michigan State. "The experiences I had there have been invaluable, and they are still with me. It is fun there for teens, but they don't realize that they are building the skills that they will fall back on to build our careers, impact our communities, and make the world a better place."

It's hard to say enough about the power of this drop-in space that welcomes any teen who wants to walk through their doors to participate in any part of their programming at no cost. But additionally, they serve youth that aren't free to walk in the building.

The Neutral Zone's Juvenile Justice Program provides targeted arts programming for youth who are court-involved, promoting healing, connectivity, and skill-building. In the broader community their outreach, coaching, and consulting drives restorative practices with community organizations throughout the state of Michigan to create a ripple effect of positive youth engagement.

As if that is not enough, leadership assessed their desired impact and realized that youth doesn't end when a student turns 18. "In this society we seem to think kids can just magically enter adulthood successfully without a support system," Roddy said. The reach of Neutral Zone stretched again as they launched Future Corps. This job and technical training program for high school grads, aged 18 to 24, helps to identify pathways toward successful adulthood. Now four years into this 10-year intervention, it is clear that this program is crucial for young people in society.

AFTER SEVERAL ROUNDS OF CONVERSATION, THE NEUTRAL ZONE LAUNCHED THEIR MODERN MISSION STATEMENT THAT IS REFLECTIVE OF TODAY'S YOUTH.

NZ
The Neutral Zone
MISSION STATEMENT
Neutral Zone is a transformative, youth-driven community where youth embrace their power, ignite their creativity, and launch their future to build equity, justice, and collective liberation
-Approved by the NZ board of directors October 2023

"We know our outreach has to be a wrap-around to appeal to all parts of the young people's interests," Roddy affirmed. "We host artistic and leadership programming providing resources to help young people transition into adulthood." Roddy specified, "We have weekly career, education, and life skills groups."

"In 2024 the Neutral Zone continues to really matter," Roddy explained. "We are really trying to help create great human beings who have our support in their journey to become great adults. These young people look around and see that the world is not what they want it to be and realize they can do something about it. They put in the time and preparation to better their communities. Each of these teens here show up to have a formative experience, to build their skills, their competencies, and their courage to show up as leaders in our future, to

THE NEUTRAL ZONE'S JUVENILE JUSTICE PROGRAM PROVIDES TARGETED ARTS PROGRAMMING FOR YOUTH WHO ARE COURT-INVOLVED, PROMOTING HEALING, CONNECTIVITY, AND SKILL-BUILDING.

make meaningful change."

The Neutral Zone relies heavily on the generous support of individuals, businesses, and the community to support the dreams of this community's youth. "This is their home away from home where they can be authentic and have fun," Roddy said. All the while, these teens are growing their capacity to contribute to a better future in a more perfect culture of their own making.

The Neutral Zone is located at 310 East Washington Street, Ann Arbor. Contact them by phone at (734) 214-9995 or visit the Neutral Zone online at neutral-zone.org. If you are interested in donating, visit neutral-zone.org/donate.

Freebirth in Ann Arbor: Why Women are Choosing to Birth Outside the System

By Kaili Brooks

Pregnancy and childbirth is a time of immense transformation. For some women it is the most beautiful day of their lives, but for so many more, the process of giving birth is a traumatic memory marked by surgery, violation, and a loss of control. In an act of conscious rebellion against this standard, women are choosing to look to the past and choose to birth the way we were always intended to: unmonitored, unmolested, and free. One such woman I talked to, "Dana," describes her birth as being, "incredibly straightforward without any drama."

In an act of conscious rebellion against this standard, women are choosing to look to the past and choose to birth the way we were always intended to: unmonitored, unmolested, and free.

"I was in early labor for a few days prior to giving birth. I went about my days as usual, attending to my home and my 2.5-year-old. The night before she was born, after my toddler and husband fell asleep, I labored throughout the night, mostly in bed with my husband and toddler sleeping through it. I would wake my husband for encouragement and hold his hand during most contractions. By the early morning, I was feeling discouraged, feeling like baby wasn't going to come for a while. I was wondering if my contractions were 'productive.' I did have feelings, probably an hour or so before she emerged, that I couldn't do it anymore. It was 8:00 a.m. when I felt I needed to have a bowel movement—I moved to the bathroom, realizing that it was the baby I was feeling coming down. Without thinking, I got down onto my hands and knees and started involuntarily pushing. It was the most incredible feeling—I couldn't stop it and didn't want to! I remember being in shock and amazed as I thought I had another whole day of labor ahead of me. I called in my husband as I felt her head emerge and by 8:15 a.m. she was born into my husband's hands while my son waited in the bedroom, watching from a distance. My husband passed her to me through my legs and I was overcome with joy."

In the holistic community, we are very aware of home birth, but Dana's birth was different from those we may be familiar with. She had chosen to birth in bliss, with only her husband and son in attendance. There was purposefully no medical presence, no doula, and no midwife—a truly sovereign birth.

Sovereign birth is birth that serves the mother. It centers on her choice, and her choice alone. At the center of sovereign birth is the idea that birth, much like life, sex, and death, is natural and in most cases, occurs perfectly without the need for interference. Described by sovereign birth worker, Reilly Campbell (see page 79 for more from her), sovereign birth is similar to shamanism. It is a deep connection to yourself, your baby, the Earth, and all the women who came before you. F for more from her or many women, their sovereign birth includes the presence of a wise woman or doula who remains completely hands off and offers only the support the mother requests herself. They are not a medical professional: they do not seek to "fix" her birth. They are responsible TO the mother, not responsible FOR the mother and baby. The birthing woman is responsible for herself and her baby and takes absolute control of her own experience. Sovereign birth is many things, but it is certainly not new. Until the dawn of modern obstetrics in the mid-to-late 19th century, almost every woman birthed at home, and unless a medical professional was invited in, birth was a private and sacred affair.

Under this umbrella is freebirth, such as the one Dana experienced. Coined by the late midwife and activist Jeannine Parvati Baker, freebirth defines a birth that takes place without the presence of a hired birth professional. For most women, this looks like her and her partner. Hand in hand with freebirth often comes a wild pregnancy, where a woman chooses to eschew testing, ultrasounds, medications, and any sort of traditional monitoring one may undergo in the medical system. Named by Yolande Norris-Clark, renowned freebirther of ten children, to choose a wild pregnancy is to embrace all of the "wildness" that comes with pregnancy and birth. Morning sickness, cramping, mood-swings included. You live your life and your pregnancy the way you want to, with what feels good and right for you, without the prying eyes of an outside source.

This may sound frightening, as everyone has heard of the horror stories surrounding pregnancy and birth, but everyone has heard of freebirths occurring perfectly without realizing it! Think of all the babies born in the back of cars or apartments, coming too fast to make it to the hospital. Those, though not willingly chosen, are freebirths. The stories we are told and in turn tell ourselves about birth have the power to change attitudes. The medical system is designed to pathologize and weaponize every symptom someone may have, whether real or perceived. The same is true for birth. Obviously, there are true medical emergencies. However, false emergencies occur more often than not, resulting in women being overly monitored, receiving unnecessary tests, being induced early, or in many cases, given c-sections which were entirely unneeded. In the system, you are subject to a cascade of interventions, from epidural and Pitocin to c-section, and these all seek to separate you from the process of birth. Not only that, but they can also make it hard to connect to your child in the postpartum period causing issues with breastfeeding and bonding. This story has been told time and time again, and it has grown stale.

In the holistic community, we are very aware of home birth, but Dana's birth was different from those we may be familiar with. She had chosen to birth in bliss, with only her husband and son in attendance. There was purposefully no medical presence, no doula, and no midwife—a truly sovereign birth.

The reasons women may have for choosing freebirth often mirror the reasons a woman might have historically chosen a home birth. These include not wanting to birth in the medical system with the invasive testing and monitoring one is subjected to, wanting to birth in a place they feel safe, not wanting their baby to be subjected to circumcision or involuntary medical procedures, ad infinitum. However, not all homebirth midwives are created equal. For many women, the presence of a federally licensed professional indicates that they are beholden to the medical board as opposed to the birthing woman. This is not to say all homebirth midwives behave in this manner, as of course incredible, women-centered midwives exist. However, due to the way the medical system and licensing process within the legal system function, a medical midwife may in fact just be mirroring hospital interventions within the home. A medical midwife is also required to transfer a woman to the hospital if she feels it is necessary, when again, for most women it is a false emergency. For these reasons, a woman

may not want to take on the risk of hiring a professional who may interfere in her birthing process.

So far, I have not addressed your likely main concern, and that is for the safety of the mother and baby. It is true that wild pregnancy and freebirth can result in injury and death. This is also true for births that occur within the medical system. The crux of the argument for sovereign birth is that true emergencies are rare. Undisturbed birth is what our body is designed for. Is it worth the risk of entering the system and facing all the aforementioned troubles on the

The reasons women may have for choosing freebirth often mirror the reasons a woman might have historically chosen a home birth. These include not wanting to birth in the medical system with the invasive testing and monitoring one is subjected to, wanting to birth in a place they feel safe, not wanting their baby to be subjected to circumcision or involuntary medical procedures, ad infinitum.

Even for those who do not choose a freebirth, the implications of the existence of freebirth should be taken into consideration. The medical industry is not dedicated to the wellbeing of the birthing woman and needs to undergo serious changes if it is to serve us.

off chance that your birth may be atypical? For many women, it is not. For Dana, the freebirther featured in this article, she feared the interventions of the medical system far more than anything else.

Even for those who do not choose a freebirth, the implications of the existence of freebirth should be taken into consideration. The medical industry is not dedicated to the wellbeing of the birthing woman and needs to undergo serious changes if it is to serve us. Most women in today's society are not comfortable with the idea of freebirth, and that is their sovereign choice to make. The issue is with the lack of viable, woman-centered options. At the very least, better full-service birth education needs to be implemented so that women feel confident in the choices they are making surrounding their bodies. Instinctual birthing and mothering need to be brought back into focus. What are we biologically designed to do? How do we fulfill our body's wants and needs in today's modern world? Women and babies deserve better. Sovereign birth not only brings a child into the world, it also brings to fruition the idea that you know what is best for your mother-baby dyad.

Ultimately, I don't seek to tell you that you must birth a specific way or choose freebirth. However, I urge you to choose the birth that you want, not the birth that you are told that you need. Own your choices, and know that in the end, you hold 100% responsibility for your body, your birth, and your baby. Do the deep research, trust in the ancestral wisdom of your body, and let no one tell you how to birth.

Kaili Brooks was born, raised, and resides in Ypsilanti with her husband and toddler son. She is the calendar editor for The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal and a Secondary English Education major at EMU. If you are interested in

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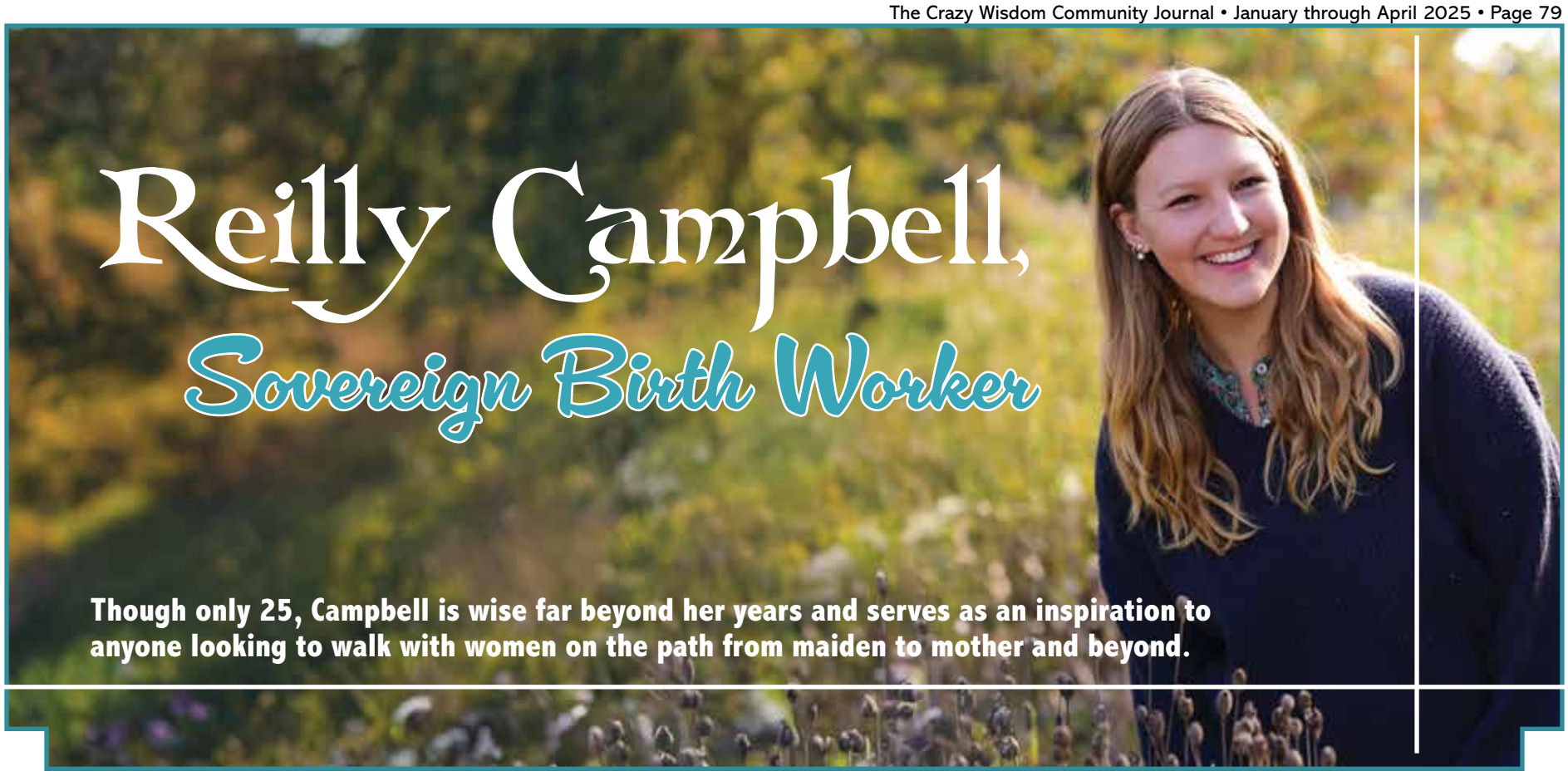

Reilly Campbell, Sovereign Birth Worker

Though only 25, Campbell is wise far beyond her years and serves as an inspiration to anyone looking to walk with women on the path from maiden to mother and beyond.

• By Kaili Brooks • Photos by Hilary Nichols

In October, I sat down with my good friend Reilly Campbell for a discussion about birth, life, Ann Arbor, and everything in between. An Austin, Texas transplant, Campbell can best be described as a ray of sunshine. Though only 25, she is wise far beyond her years and serves as an inspiration to anyone looking to walk with women on the path from maiden to mother and beyond.

Kaili Brooks: Who are you? Tell me the story of how you found your way into birth work.

Reilly Campbell: I grew up as the oldest of my siblings and neighbors and had a lot of experience with caretaking for young children. I filled my life with families and young kids. I've always wanted to be a mom: all of my decisions have been guided by that. There's this overwhelming narrative that mothering is suffering, and I always knew that wasn't my story. My interests in college were permaculture and birth, and I found the truth that the closer we align with nature's design, the less difficult our life will be—the more joy, ease, and simplicity we will have. Birth is the foundation of everything, and our birth experience shapes our life.

Kaili Brooks: How did you come to Ann Arbor? How have you integrated yourself in the community?

Reilly Campbell: My fiancée and I moved to Ann Arbor because my maternal roots are here, and we desired a more cyclical and village-like way of life, which the four seasons and smaller community here really allow for. The farmer's market has been a special place for me to see familiar faces. I see people I know all the time. I'm grounded in this place. I'm home. I nanny for a few families in town and that's allowed me to get to know the mothering community at the libraries and baby music classes which has been very special. People are a huge part of my value system. I love centering my community. I go to Earthwell Retreat Center often and help lead a yoga class there.

"Sovereign birth keeping is a paradigm in which you go back to the fundamentals of birth and life and honor the body's intelligence and birth in a way that is undisturbed and un-pathologized."

–Reilly Campbell

Kaili Brooks: What is your philosophy on birth, and what does sovereign birth mean to you?

Reilly Campbell: My business, Birth As You Are, is based on the origins of life. Sovereign birth keeping is a paradigm in which you go back to the fundamentals of birth and life and honor the body's intelligence and birth in a way that is undisturbed and un-pathologized. It differs from midwifery today in that it is unmedicalized. We're not trying to fix birth. [We are] just trying to hold a space for the woman to meet her full power. It's based on the whole woman, spiritual, physical, and mental combined. It needs privacy, trust, and love, and you must trust in your body and let the physiology of birth guide you.

Kaili Brooks: What services do you provide specifically for birthing mothers or women in general?

Reilly Campbell: My big focus is on community building and gathering. One of the ways I do that is my monthly women's circle, and I really love collaborating with the women in my community. I co-lead a perinatal yoga series focusing on connection and movement. I provide full spectrum care, prenatal coaching, and support in planning and nesting. I think it's important to put a lot of intention into the space you're living and birthing in, so I support women in setting themselves up for an easeful postpartum. I fully ensure that the postpartum mother is nourished and supported, ensuring that she's spending as much time as possible with her baby and feeling loved—being a sister during her vulnerable transition to motherhood. I walk with women in their birth holding space and reflecting their power back to them. I offer birth story medicine where we will debrief your birth story and help to heal and integrate any trauma you may have from previous births. I also offer ceremonies such as mother blessings and closing of the bones to honor your postpartum body. Gathering together with other women regulates our nervous system and we need it innately, so I focus a lot of my energy on ensuring we have opportunities to be with one another.

Kaili Brooks: Where do you hope to take your business going forward? What is your vision for the future?

Reilly Campbell: I want my business to become more collaborative. I think women are meant to do things together and I'd love to work more with the brilliant women in this community to serve each other more. My big goals are to create a women's collective and to be more present in the community, I'd like to offer events for people to dip their toes into what we're all about at Birth as you Are—things like Menarche reclamation ceremonies or a village prenatal where women can come and honor their bodies and power.

If you are interested in learning more about Reilly Campbell and her business and services, visit birthasyouare.com.

Healing Touch Practitioner Barbara McConnell — On a Heart's Mission for Healing

Photo by Michelle McLemore

By Michelle McLemore • Photos by Susan Ayer and Michelle McLemore

I stepped carefully upon the stone walkway, treading past raised garden beds, massive shade trees, and garden ornaments and recalled the echo of curiosity and caution which accompanied my first visit to this magical place. It was nearly fifteen years ago for Level 1 Healing Touch energy therapy class at the home of Barbara McConnell in Grass Lake.

I mused momentarily about how much I had changed—no, evolved. And then, there at the door was Barb. She observed out loud how my hair was more gray while hers was more white, and I noted she held the same sweet smile and grandmotherly appeal, with the same disarming sparkle in her eye—the sparkle, I had come to learn, was a hint at the uncommon knowledge and extraordinary experiences she embodied from her twenty years as a Healing Touch® Certified Practitioner and Instructor.

Imagine sitting in a chair or lying comfortably on your back dressed in loose clothing. A heart-centered, gentle voice says, "Do I have permission to offer Healing Touch for your highest and greatest good with unconditional love?" The new client often tries to interrupt to say "yes," but then is caught by surprise—and sometimes an emotional grateful rush—when they hear the unexpected offering of love. An off the body palm scan is done to sense, and assess, energy flow and potential blocks or imbalances anywhere in the body or biofield. (To "follow the energy" means to hear what the body's energy says it needs and to follow that guidance.)

With gentle finger and palm positions on joints, around the skull, sometimes on acupressure points, and other times over organs or other body systems, the client may feel tingling, temperature changes, or energy movement within the body. Some people see colors, images, or have heightened intuitive experiences. Almost always by the end, the client feels physically and emotionally lighter, mentally clearer, and more emotionally stable and grounded regardless of what may be waiting at home.

Some people see colors, images, or have heightened intuitive experiences. Almost always by the end, the client feels physically and emotionally lighter, mentally clearer, and more emotionally stable and grounded regardless of what may be waiting at home.

Healing Touch® is an energy therapy modality developed by Janet Mentgen (RN, BSN) in the late 1980s from careful observation during nursing situations, analysis, indigenous healer interviews, research on healing properties of touch and the subtle energy anatomy and life energy (also known as Qi, Prana, Chi, and Ki) across cultures. The practitioner becomes like a straw for universal energy or earth energy to move through and be directed into the energy field and body of the client via light touch or hovering palms around the body. This can balance and influence internal energy frequencies to the cellular/molecular levels and into the Hara Line across time aspects. It can remove energy blocks, promote healing, calm the mind, and elevate the client's overall frequency for new, or higher quality possibilities in mental, emotional, physical, or spiritual aspects of life. Healing Touch is safe for all ages (including in vitro), non-intrusive, and effective on plants, and other species, as well as humans.

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Photo by Michelle McLemore

Mentgen structured her discoveries into a consistent curriculum by 1989 as "Healing Touch." The modality became certified by the American Holistic Nurses Association (AHNA) and classes still today may be used for re-certification credits because of the curriculum's uniformity and science basis. The North American Nursing Diagnosis Association (NANDA) lists an "Imbalanced Energy Field" as a Class 3 Diagnosis. McConnell defines it as, "A disruption in the flow of energy surrounding a person's being that results in disharmony of the body, mind, and/or spirit."

McConnell admitted initially she had her doubts about the concept, but then she acknowledged intervention occurs in our lives. "Everything truly happens for a reason. If we allow ourselves to be present and grounded, it will teach us a lot."

Over time the program expanded into Healing Touch International and now is known as Healing Beyond Borders, as a non-profit international educational organization. The modality is used in over 100 hospitals in the U.S., has been taught in colleges and university medical programs, and taught around the world. Research studies are ongoing and published frequently in peer-reviewed respected journals.

McConnell's introduction to Healing Touch was a two-part invitation during a trip to Hawaii. While visiting her daughter, McConnell and her husband Bill were invited to a seminar at which the speaker said, "Everything that happens to you is perfect." McConnell admitted initially she had her doubts about the concept, but then she acknowledged intervention occurs in our lives. "Everything truly happens for a reason. If we allow ourselves to be present and grounded, it will teach us a lot." Shortly after, while babysitting, she met a Healing Touch practitioner and inquired about it. The lady told her to "look it up because it was everywhere."

When McConnell returned home, she did just that and as synchronicity would have it, the first class was at the Mercy Center…the next weekend. It was last minute, but she called to see if there was a spot available, and there was. The teacher encouraged her to come for a treatment first so she could get a better idea of what it was about before she made the investment.

Bill went along and watched the pendulum used during assessment. McConnell recalled, "At the beginning of the session, it wasn't moving. By the end, it was moving strong. Even with his engineering mind, he admitted, 'Something was making it move.'" Barb was intrigued with each level. Upon completion of the five levels to become a full certified practitioner, she immediately started steps to become an instructor as she knew she wanted to be able to share it. Her husband took classes, as well, and has been her faithful helper throughout it all.

It took 17 years to become a Level 5 instructor as the process is very involved to ensure instructors teach in a manner that courses can retain their AHNA credentialing. As of Nov. 4, 2024, it's been 20 years that she has been teaching. "There were a lot of aha moments along the way," she mused with eyes twinkling and a slight bemused smile.

Like Janet Mentgen, McConnell had been in health care. She was an LPN who worked in industry and then personnel. At one point, she had three plants of employees reporting to her. She worked in nurseries, then ER, and she loved every different experience. Along the way she trained with Dana Young of Beyoung, now Younify, and learned about the energy frequencies of essential oils and their uses for wellness.

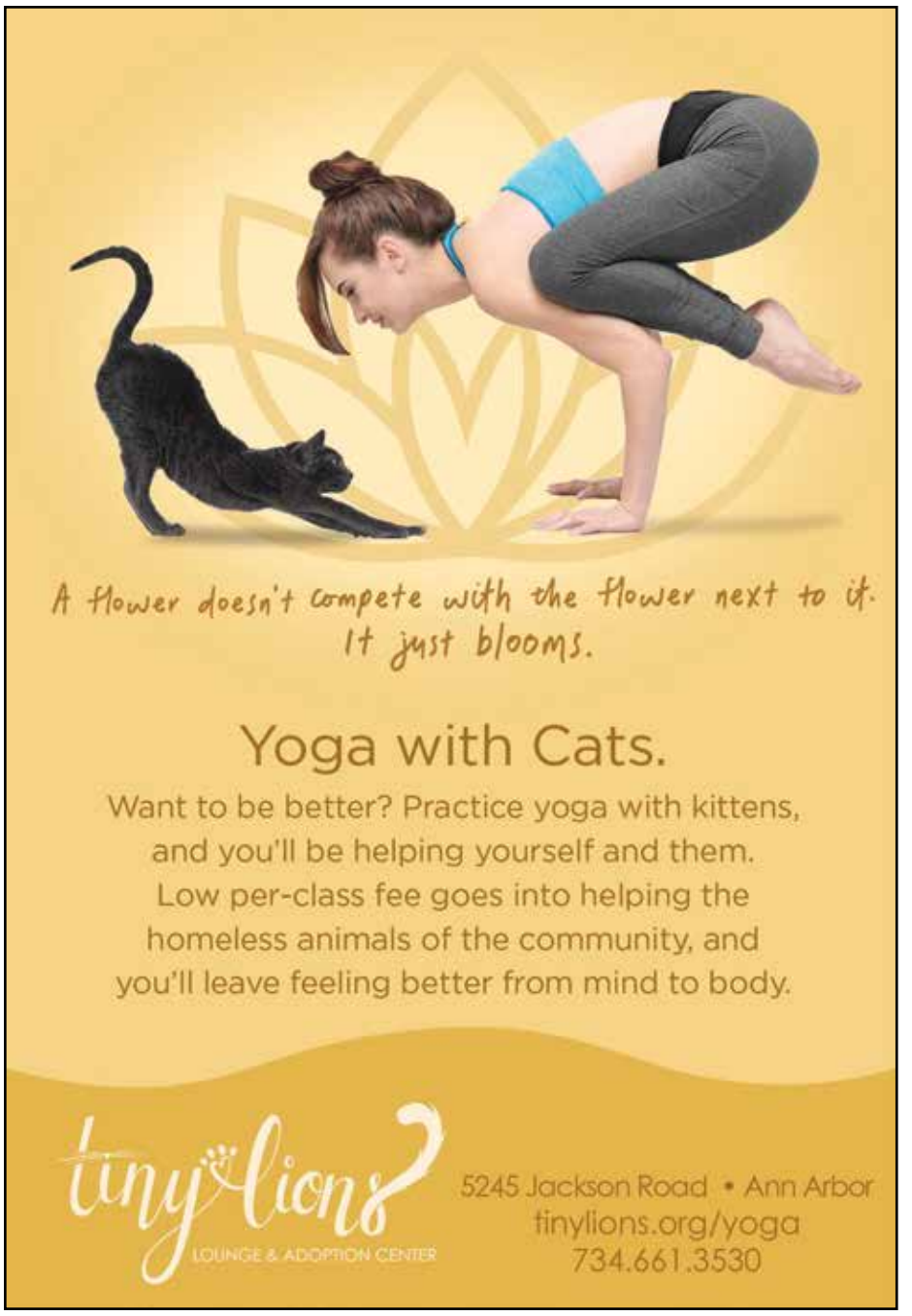
Healing Touch added a new dimension of awareness and ability for McConnell's work with people, animals, and general healthcare. I still recall an experience she recounted in my Level 1 class at her house. We were all seated in her comfy basement class area. Pillows, carpet, low light, shiny faces–the more you work with energy, the more likely it is that your face will start to look dewy or glow after a couple hours. She told about a time she happened upon a large bird that had been hit by a car. It wasn't moving, but she began immediately doing the brush away field technique. After a few minutes, it came to and was able to walk, and then fly away rejuvenated.

McConnell recalled her mentor, Janet, emphasizing, "I'm charging you to teach people to feel and assess the energy. And most important, make it possible to follow that energy—give them the insight to follow it. Sure, we have the techniques, and they work, but connect with Source and do what you are being given."

Another time she was working with a vet experiencing phantom pains around his amputated lower legs. McConnell was led to "sew" around the field of the amputation and the pain disappeared.

Certainly, she has encountered skeptics over the years. In the early years she did community talks and had booth space at different community events. Once while doing public chair sessions, a minister walked up and began condemning her. "He said, I shouldn't be there and what I was doing was evil.' I was able to maintain my composure because I understood—he was not in a place where he could listen nor understand [the truth]. So, I said, 'I honor where you are and I'm not what you think I am.'"

She offered to give him a mini session which he refused. Intuitively she felt his wife was experiencing neck pain and she offered to get rid of her pain.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The beautiful thing about giving Healing Touch is its universal benefit, a benefit and lesson that was emphasized in every class I took with Barb and other HT instructors: "Working on others is working on yourself."

The wife hesitantly agreed to sit for a session and found great relief. She relayed the success to her husband. "He came back, didn't quite apologize, but acknowledged that I had helped his wife. He conceded there must be something to it."

The beautiful thing about giving Healing Touch is its universal benefit, a benefit and lesson that was emphasized in every class I took with Barb and other HT instructors: "Working on others is working on yourself." In holding space, allowing intuitive universal energy to flow through us to assist others, there is healing and regulation for us as the channel, or power cord so to speak, even beyond what we should have done in self-care and self-preparation before connecting with a client.

Healing Touch Practitioner Barbara McConnell — On a Heart's Mission for Healing

McConnell explained that sometimes, the work can lead to unexpected and quite visceral self-healing. "At times, working on another may trigger a release of something stuck in your own self, despite grounding and shielding. The energy connects you." Sitting in her armchair next to her crystal altar and collection of spiritual mementos, she slowly described a visit to a patient in a hospital room who had been a victim of domestic violence. Three times in the hospital room, McConnell experienced extreme dizziness, to the point that despite various grounding and other intercessions, she had to leave the room to reset and clear before starting again. It was only later as she was pulling up to a stop sign that the epiphany surfaced: It had been a prior experience of her own. "I felt lighter and more at peace after understanding." Working through her client's experience opened her to work through her own, simultaneously.

I've always thought of energy work/sharing as deeply personal and the greatest zone of unconditional love. When someone lives and breathes the work, they are sometimes blessed with gifts of new techniques. McConnell humbly experienced this blessing stemming from a 2020 heart attack.

She recalled, "The heart attack was a breeze, and I came home in a couple days. But the doctor put me on quite a few blood thinners. I had a vision: my heart was having difficulty processing the thinners. I told the doctor, but he didn't change anything. Three months later, I had a brain bleed and a stroke from too many blood thinners."

She and her husband had been driving their motor home up north to her mother-in-law's home. That night in bed, repetitive questions alerted Bill to a problem, and he called 9-1-1. Her lesson of "everything happens for a reason" is clearly evidenced in the series of fortunate events involved.

"We went to the hospital in Petoskey where a wonderful neurologist happened to be in town. He said, 'Most would go to surgery to remove the dead cells, but I believe the body will heal itself.' (Removing any dead cells might have damaged or eliminated memories or certain functions).

The timing was amazing. Her original doctor did not listen. The stroke waited until she was near a doctor whose philosophies aligned with hers and that he was the one on call in her hour of need.

She thought, "Perfect." The doctor was confident the body could heal and recall all the memories. The timing was amazing. Her original doctor did not listen. The stroke waited until she was near a doctor whose philosophies aligned with hers and that he was the one on call in her hour of need.

It was during the following hours that the mystical gift occurred. McConnell described, "I could feel everybody working on me. I asked my guardian angels to bring the unconditional love in a way I could receive it for my highest and greatest good and that I could recognize it coming in. The next morning when I woke up, I felt like I was in a cocoon. I could feel the peace, the calm, and wonderful things going through my body. I knew it was reorganizing my cells."

She felt rejuvenated and Bill was amazed. She healed with no adverse effects.

McConnell could recall in detail everything about the experience and later felt guided to make an energetic cocoon for a friend who had been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. The friend had tried chemo, but decided it was too painful and called in hospice. She wanted to live with dignity. She accepted McConnell's offer. The friend used the cocoon and before long her doctors told her she was in "radical remission." They didn't know how it happened and clarified that the cancer wasn't spreading. The woman is still alive today.

In 2021, McConnell called a friend to whom she dictated the experience and cocoon directions. "I began giving it to my level 4 and 5 students and instructors. Janet used to say, "You can't hold on too tight [to techniques gifted to you] or they would go away." McConnell's eyes shone and a slight tremble seemed to pulse through the field around her.

"I want it to be out there and used," she enthused, still visibly awed by the gifted knowledge and its blessing in her life. "My daughter believes it's best if I formally publish it, so steps are not mis-explained by others, or its source not attributed appropriately. I get emotional because it's awesome. Why they chose me to share it with…" she shook her head and looked down at her hands in her lap—hands that show wrinkles and age, yet energetically, still radiate the strength and grace we all share when connected and living true to our luminescence partnership.

McConnell further not, "People can get caught up in fear of what is going on with our country. I know how to stay grounded. I don't teach being in fear. If you are worried about getting sick, work on your immune system. I never got Covid. I was not in fear of doing so. Energy work should be part of everyone's life. I hope people will try it. We don't know when we wake up tomorrow what will be. If people want peace and calm today, they need to experience Healing Touch."

I sat across from her, feeling the impression of all the former students and clients that had walked through this same space. And then I looked at her—really looked to see her. She, at 80 years old, sat with a reserved smile. Knowing. Empowered in her presence. Peaceful/comfortable in her Being. Without the business and rush—she had come into herself. Her field was wide, confident, loving. She was still enthused about Healing Touch, this existence, and teaching others, but in a graceful elegance rather than the sprightly, busy whirlwind of 15 years ago.

Those that grow in their energy-understanding and practices become like powerful transformers. They are capable of moving mountains while sitting comfortably in an armchair, drinking a cup of tea, keenly aware of what is in front of, as well as beyond, their physical eyesight and proximity. The guides have recognized her zeal and commitment to share wellness with compassion. May others, stirred by her journey or words, follow the invitation to learn more for their sake and those they care about.

You can find classes in Healing Touch® by looking online at healingbeyondborders.org/ and visit the Healing Touch clinic in Farmington Hills with information available at healingtouchcenter.info/Healing_Touch/Welcome.html.

Michelle McLemore is a freelance writer, energy wellness practitioner, stress management guide, and workshop presenter for schools, businesses, and one-on-one clients. Her background as an English, history, psychology, and writing teacher supports personalizing client self-care for creating balance and enhancing vitality. Learn more at michellemclemore.com or facebook.com/MichelleMcLemoreHealingGuide. You can reach out ro Barb McConnell at barbmcconnell7@gmail.com.

Welcome to Spirit Seeds! I'm Triana, your guide through this journey of inquiry. I am a single mother, a Wounded Healer, an Eclectic Witch, and practicing Spiritualist of sixteen years. My last few years have been spent in the pursuit of knowledge which I believe is one of the master keys of life. I received my first oracle deck from my grandfather sixteen years ago and have been reading cards professionally for the past seven years. In 2023, I was certified in Quantum Healing Hypnosis Therapy and Herbalism.

In this column readers submit their questions, and we dive deep to find the answers. We'll embark on a journey of holistic exploration, delving into ancient practices and unraveling the enigmas of existence. Whether you're a seasoned enthusiast or a curious newcomer, this column offers a platform for deepening your understanding and expanding your consciousness. Are you curious about a certain new-age subject or practice? Seeking advice or perspective on a spiritual or holistic matter? Submit your questions at AskSpiritSeed@gmail.com and have a chance to be featured in our next issue.

What are the most powerful ways to use light language and energy codes to activate and heal my DNA?

To activate and heal your DNA with light language and energy codes, start by creating a peaceful space where you feel comfortable and relaxed—maybe light a candle, burn sage, or hold a favorite crystal. Light language is essentially a type of energetic communication that goes beyond words. You don't need to "understand" it mentally. It works at a soul level, speaking directly to your energy field. If you're comfortable, try speaking or singing light language yourself. Let whatever sounds want to come through just flow, even if it feels strange at first. Imagine those sounds as vibrations unlocking dormant potential in your DNA. Visualize light codes—like streams of golden light or geometric patterns—flowing into your cells, activating healing and transformation-like keys unlocking a pool of potential. Another option is to listen to recordings of light language (there are many online) while you meditate. You can also combine this with breathwork or simply place your hands on your heart to feel the energy. The goal is to let your body and soul do the work—trust that your DNA knows how to receive this energy and heal itself over time.

Take it slow, and always listen to how your body responds. To explore Light Language in greater depth, consider watching the 2017 documentary, *The Language of Light*, which delves into the science and spirituality behind this form of communication. Additionally, Jamye Price, a renowned spiritual teacher, and Light Language channeler, offers insightful teachings and activations on her YouTube channel. For those who prefer reading, the book *Light Language: Decoding Sacred Geometry and the Divine Matrix* by Zarah Sita provides a profound exploration of Light Language and its connection to sacred geometry and the energetic matrix of the universe.

How can I continue to evolve spiritually and thrive on my path when the material world feels so corrupted and chaotic?

Thriving spiritually in the current state of the world is challenging, but it's also an opportunity for deeper growth. One advanced practice I find helpful is grounding into the Earth's energy, while consciously connecting with higher realms. When you're grounded, you stay stable amidst the chaos. I recommend doing a daily Earth connection meditation—visualize roots extending from your feet into Earth's core, anchoring you into its stability. Simultaneously, open your crown chakra to receive guidance from your higher self. Another key is spiritual discernment—learning to filter the noise of the material world. I like to use shielding techniques, such as creating a mirrored shield around my aura to reflect any negative or lower energies, so they don't penetrate my field. Stay committed to sacred rituals, like working with crystal grids that resonate with higher frequencies and performing regular energy clearing (smoke cleansing with palo santo, sage, or using sound bowls). Most importantly, align your actions with your spiritual purpose, no matter the state of the world. You can use intentional living practices, such as consciously choosing activities and people that uplift your vibration. You become a beacon of light despite the external chaos by focusing on your internal alignment.

How can I cultivate a deeper connection with my houseplants, attuning to their unique needs and energies to care for them more intuitively while fostering a harmonious bond?

Cultivating a deeper connection with your houseplants is a beautiful and rewarding practice. Start by meditating with your plants. Find a quiet space, sit near your plant, and close your eyes. Visualize a light connecting your heart with the plant's energy. Ask the plant what it needs and listen to any intuitive impressions you receive. Practice mindful observation—spend time simply being with your plants, noticing their growth patterns and how they respond to their environment. Pay attention to subtle changes, like leaf color or wilting, and use these observations to guide your care. You can also use crystal energy to enhance this connection. Place crystals like green aventurine or clear quartz near your plants.

These stones can help harmonize the plant's energy with your own. Try holding a crystal and meditating with it while focusing on your plant to strengthen the bond. Daily communication with your plants is key. Speak to them or use gentle humming to share positive energy. Acknowledge their presence and express gratitude for their growth and beauty. By integrating these advanced practices, you'll foster a harmonious relationship with your plants, allowing you to intuitively meet their needs and enhance your shared energy.

What are ley lines? Where are some located in the United States? What type of phenomena happen there and how can one tune into this energy?

Ley lines are believed to be energy pathways around the Earth that overlap and connect into a node or energy vortex. There are many of these around the world. Some consider them to be the Earth's chakra system with the nodes being the chakra centers and the ley lines being the pathways of energy. They are seen as part of a global energy grid that connects the Earth and the cosmos. They are often linked to unusual phenomena such as heightened psychic abilities, time distortions, electrical malfunctions, and paranormal activity. People report feeling strong energy, experiencing vivid dreams, or witnessing UFOs near ley lines. Additionally, ancient structures like Stonehenge and the Pyramids of Giza are built along ley lines, suggesting these ancient societies recognized the energetic significance. Ley lines are considered important because they are believed to carry the Earth's natural energy; they act as conduits for that energy to travel around the planet. In the U.S., you might find fascinating ones like the East Coast Ley lines which connect the Great Serpent Mound in Ohio with the Newport Tower in Rhode Island, and the Mount Shasta Ley line stretching from Mount Shasta in California to Sedona in Arizona.

To tune into these energies, start by using dowsing rods or pendulums to locate ley line intersections or "nodes." Once you find these spots, spend time meditating there, focusing on connecting your energy with the ley line's flow. Try visualizing yourself as a conduit, drawing in the energy and feeling it move through you. Find your flow with that energy. Crystals like clear quartz or amethyst can amplify your connection. Hold them or place them at these sites during meditation to enhance your experience. Keeping a journal of your experiences and feelings at these locations can also deepen your understanding. By practicing these methods, you'll align with the ley line energies and enrich your spiritual journey. To learn more about Ley lines, start with classic books like *The Old Straight Track* by Alfred Watkins or *Ley Lines and Earth Energies* by David Cowan. Articles from LiveScience and *Gaia* explore ley lines' history and spiritual significance. Finally, documentaries such as *Ancient Aliens* and *The Secret of the Stones* investigate ley lines' connections to ancient sites.

a MOMENT WITH THE WONDER TWINS

By Samantha Beidoun • Photos by Hilary Nichols

I recently met with Danielle Groth and corresponded with Vicky Lovell, two of the co-founders of Angel Whispers Healing Center in Dexter. Angel Whispers aids in helping individuals and families in mind, body, and spirit. They are in the process of moving into a new space on Baker Road that will be home to an even larger collective for grief care, acupuncture, reiki, worship, and other healing modalities.

How would you describe the mission of Angel Whispers?

Danielle Groth: Angel Whispers Ministries is a 501(c)(3) federal non-profit dedicated to teaching individuals, families, and children the importance of self-love and finding wholeness in mind, body, and spirit through blending faith and energy medicine practices.

How did Angel Whispers get its name?

Vicky Lovell: When my son, Charlie, was four years old, he had to have a tonsillectomy. Before the surgery he asked my dad if he knew who would be with him in surgery, my dad responded with, "Yes, your mom!" And Charlie's response was, "No, the guy in the sky, the creator of us all!" Our family thought his response was adorable. Little did we know it was prophetic.

He did well during surgery but while I sat with Charlie in recovery, his face turned blue, the sounds of the machines went off, mayhem ensued, and Charlie flatlined. While I was holding the lifeless body of my child, the panicked room included nurses crying and one stabbing his little leg with different shots. Finally, a calm nurse entered the room, placed her hand on my shoulder and whispered into my ear, "May I try one more thing?" She proceeded to put an epinephrine mask on my son. His eyes blinked open and the machine showed his heart had resumed beating. Charlie stroked my cheek and said, "That was so peaceful."

OUR FAMILY THOUGHT HIS RESPONSE WAS ADORABLE. LITTLE DID WE KNOW IT WAS PROPHETIC.

At that moment our lives changed. I knew it was an angel who whispered into my ear and saved my son's life. After that I went and wrote Angel Whispers on a piece of paper. I knew I was meant to do something to help people feel the same peace that I felt in that moment which was also the scariest moment of my life. Here we are 16 years later, and we have pursued this calling where we help people reach wholeness in mind, body, and spirit which leads to the peace that we are all seeking in our lives.

What were the pivotal moments that turned you to these modalities?

Danielle Groth: It's a story I never would have imagined. My son was diagnosed with autism just after his second birthday. We had only recently been relocated to Germany for my husband's job. I learned so much about holistic health while living in Germany. My family became cognizant of the foods we ate and the ingredients in the products we used. We spent more time playing outside and enjoying a slower pace of life. We found homeopathy and then used it to find my son's voice. We moved home (to Saline) when specialized schooling and English became necessary for my son's success. Before we moved home, I had been chasing down an illness of my own, but doctors were unable to diagnose me with anything. My labs were always in the normal range, but I never felt well. The only thing each doctor agreed upon was that I was tremendously stressed and suggested I exercise, lighten my load, delegate, etc. I honestly tried, but life just kept throwing things my way that I could not control or ignore, much less delegate. Then in early 2016, three days after my 47th birthday, the biggest surprise of my life knocked the wind out of me: I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The stress had won. I was broken physically and mentally. That's where Reiki, EFT (emotional freedom technique), and VST (vibrational sound therapy) found me.

Reiki helped me find healing and my health and life turned around. I left my first Reiki session feeling so happy and uplifted. However, I was skeptical. How could placing hands over my body bring me such peace and relaxation? Nevertheless, I went back for a second session. This time I left feeling hopeful. By the third session, I knew I needed to learn Reiki for my own self-care and my family would certainly benefit. Since becoming a practitioner, I am more relaxed, my cortisol levels are in the normal range, and I have found joy again in my life. Most importantly, I am healthy and cancer free! Reiki also helped me find EFT, meditation, and Vibrational Sound Therapy by opening up my awareness to other stress relieving modalities. My whole family benefits and now I share my knowledge and healing with others.

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We all have the divine within us, so spirituality is beyond religion, doctrine, and rules, and is more about connecting with the love that resides within us knowing that we all come from the source of Love to love.

How did the three co-founders of Angel Whispers meet?

Vicky Lovell: I was the associate pastor at Zion Lutheran Church where Dan McConnell [the third founder of Anel Whispers], and Danielle were longtime members. We met there and realized that we were brought together for a purpose.

How were you and Vicky coined "The Wonder Twins?"

Danielle Groth: Vicky and I started seeing a friend, who had cancer, together (usually we would see people individually). I offered sound therapy and reiki, and Vicky offered prayer. After one hospital session in particular, we all witnessed a very profound healing experience. While marveling about how awesome God is, Vicky and I joked about how it felt to put our two energies together. It reminded us of a cartoon duo from our childhood called "The Wonder Twins." We joked about it with others, and they all laughed as it was so fitting. The name stuck and we decided to trademark and go with it!

How do you define spiritually?

Vicky Lovell: I believe spirituality is a person's personal relationship with the divine. We all have the divine within us, so spirituality is beyond religion, doctrine, and rules, and is more about connecting with the love that resides within us knowing that we all come from the source of Love to love.

Angel Whispers Healing Center is located at 3045 Baker Road in Dexter. Feel free to visit during business hours to check out what the place is all about or call (734) 276-2682. More information can also be found at www.angelwhispers.org.

I had been chasing down an illness of my own, but doctors were unable to diagnose me with anything. My labs were always in the normal range, but I never felt well.

Calendar edited by Kaili Brooks

Animals and Pets

Basic Animal Communication with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, January 25 & Sunday, January 26, 2025 • 9 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.• Learn to communicate with animals telepathically, the way they communicate to each other; be fully supported to open your own telepathic skills for a closer relationship with your beloved animal companions. Class is online via ZOOM. $180 per person, $90 for repeat students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Shamanic Animal Communication with Judy Liu Ramsey • Tuesday, February 4, 11, 18, 25, March 4 & 11 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Learn the difference between telepathic and shamanic animal communication; learn how to apply the best of both in an integrated way. Join us for this deeply spiritual exploration of communication. Knowledge of telepathic communication not required. Optional mentoring sessions are offered with this class on Mondays following. Class is online via ZOOM. $300, $150 for repeat students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Art and Craft

Buddhist Art as a Vehicle of Enlightenment with Glenn Mullin • Saturday, January 11 & 18 • 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. An immersive and experiential experience into the forms of art used as meditational tools in various Buddhist traditions around the world, with special emphasis on the use of sound, movement, and the visual arts; including the use of visualized art forms used in mandala meditation for arousing the primordial mind of natural enlightenment. Online only. $120 Jewel Heart Members/$150 Non-Members. Pay what you can--no one turned away. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Nikki Nanos on Art as Mindfulness • Thursday, January 16 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join us and explore an engaging way of viewing, experiencing, and holding space for art. You will mindfully gain a new appreciation for art while viewing an artist's use of color, texture, and lines to expand your consciousness. Let your inner child ask, "Why?" Be curious and liberate your imagination. For more information visit nikkinanos.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Candle Pouring Workshop & Scentsy Bingo with Yuliya Koval and Tina Miller • Sunday, January 26 • 4 to 7:00 p.m. • Have you ever wanted to create your own beautiful, scented candles? Here's your chance! Learn from experts while supporting our local youth musicians. You'll learn professional candle-making secret, all about waxes, wicks, and fragrances, color blending techniques, safe pouring methods, expert tips and tricks. While your handcrafted candle sets, join us for: Scentsy BINGO with fantastic prizes and refreshments while you mingle. 100% of proceeds support the Plymouth Fife and Drum Corps. $45. For more information visit yuliyasnaturals.com.

HeArt to Art: Painting & Mindfulness with Maureen Pizzuti • Saturday, February 15 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • Join artist Maureen Pizzuti on a journey into the process of intuitive creativity. We'll tap into your heart's essence with a meditation, allowing it to present itself on the canvas where you'll create a meaningful painting. The experience will leave you feeling grounded and alive. No experience necessary. All supplies included. $48. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Katherine Munter on Art Therapy • Thursday, February 20 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • We welcome you to learn more about the healing potential of art therapy. Join us for a talk and group art experience. The focus of art therapy is on discovery, meaning-making, creation, and personal growth. It's the process—not the final product—that is vital. For more information contact Katherine at katherine@creativelifetherapy.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Author Events

Author Talk with George Balarezo • Wednesday, January 8 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Discover raw adventure as George Balarezo talks about his award-winning book, *Unhinged in Ethiopia: Two Thousand Kilometers of Hell and Heaven on a Bicycle*. Balarezo's gripping tale about his solo, unsupported cycling expedition across Ethiopia in 2019 will leave you inspired to go on your own life-changing journey. FREE. For more informationemail events@crazywisdom.net.

Author Talk with Cat Robinette • Wednesday, January 22 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Catharine Robinette shares insights from her new book, *Heal the Water*. Explore water's ancient spiritual significance, its role in healing, and the vital connection between women and water stewardship in Indigenous cultures. Discover how to protect and honor this sacred resource today. Q&A and book signing to follow. FREE. For more information contact Cat at catmetaphysicalvibrations@gmail.com or email events@crazywisdom.net.

Author Talk with Catherine Carr • Wednesday, February 26 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • *World Soul: Healing Ourselves and the Earth through Pagan Theology*. Our society is troubled. From environmental destruction to political extremism, something has gone wrong. But what? Author Catherine Carr suggests theological solutions to the devaluing of life in her primer on Pagan theology. $20 suggested donation. For more information email events@crazywisdom.net.

Book Discussion Groups

Dine and Discuss *The Sing Sing Files: One Journalist, Six Innocent Men and a 20-Year Struggle to Free Them*, by Dan Slepian with Janet Doyle • Wednesday, March 26 • 5 to 7:00 p.m. • In 2002, Dan Slepian, a veteran producer for NBC's Dateline, received a tip from a Bronx homicide detective that two men were serving twenty-five years to life in prison for a 1990 murder they did not commit. This led Slepian to twenty years of investigating claims of innocence and to the unveiling of a flawed justice system. Books available at the Weber Desk beginning January 13. Registration required. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

If you are interested in obtaining some biographical information about the teachers, lecturers, and workshop leaders whose classes, talks, and events are listed in this calendar, please look in the section that follows the calendar, which is called "Teachers, Lecturers, Workshop Leaders, and The Centers" and which starts on page 98.

Art by Jennifer Carson

OUR CALENDAR EDITOR'S PICKS OF INTERESTING HAPPENINGS IN OUR COMMUNITY

- **Monthly Moon Flow & Gathering with Courtney Fitzpatrick** · See Yoga
- **Silent Reflections with Marylin Beker** · See Retreats
- **Reawakening the Mind-Body-Mother Earth Connection with Robin Lily Goldberg** · See Holistic Health
- **Who's In Charge, Your Thoughts or You? With Nikki Nanos** · See Personal Growth
- **Chanting for World Peace with Ordained Dharma Teachers** · See Buddhism
- **Cacao + Sound with Rob Meyer Kukan** · See Meditation
- **Pelvic Power with Suzanne Willets Brooks** · See Exercise and Fitness
- **ConVocation 2025 with Christopher Penczak, Benebell Wen, Mat Auryn, Devin Hunter, Priestess Stephanie Rose Bird, and more** · See Pagan Spirituality
- **A Jesuit's Guide to the Stars with Brother Guy Consolmango** · See Spiritual Development

THE CRAZY WISDOM CALENDAR

Breathwork

Guided Group Breathwork with Jackie Miller • Sunday, January 5, 19, February 2, 16, March 2, 16, April 6 & 20 • 6 to 7:30 p.m. • First and third Sundays. A group session of gentle, connected breathing and breath holds with music, guided by Jackie Miller, certified breathwork facilitator. Experience the power of activated breath energy and learn a variety of supportive breathing techniques. FREE, donations welcome. Registration required. For more information contact Jackie at jackie@thisbreath.com or visit thisbreath.com.

Breathwork: Breathing Life into your Yoga Practice with Joseph Leary • Saturday, March 8 • 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. • Connecting breath to yoga is part of the practice and provides increased stamina, both physically and mentally. We go over breathing techniques, cues, and mindfulness through various poses, movements, and meditations. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Jackie Miller on Breathwork • Thursday, March 20 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Activated breathwork is a form of time travel for deep emotional work. Come explore what makes conscious connected breathing such a powerful practice for growth on all levels. Bring your questions and curiosity! FREE. For more information visit thisbreath.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Buddhism

Sunday Morning Meditation Sitting hosted by Still Mountain Buddhist Meditation Center • Ongoing Sundays • 10 to 11:30 a.m. • Non guided silent meditation followed by sharing or dharma talk. FREE. For more information contact Ken at (734) 678-0264 or email kenwmorley@yahoo.com.

Miracle of Mindfulness, a Peer-Led Group • Ongoing Sundays • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • The Huron River Mindfulness Community is a safe and inclusive meeting place for anyone to practice mindfulness in the tradition of Plum Village, established by Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact the Huron River Mindfulness Community at (734) 273-9991, email huronrivermc@gmail.com, or visit huronrivermc.com.

Jewel Heart Sunday Talks: Ancient Wisdom, Modern Times, with Demo Rinpoche • Sunday, January 5, 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6, 13, 20 & 27 • 11:00 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. • Join Demo Rinpoche for weekly Sunday morning public talks on a variety of topics that are suitable for newcomers and long-timers alike, followed by a facilitated group discussion based on the morning talk. FREE, donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Creating Space: Clarity and Insight through Meditation with John Madison and Wendy Weiner • Monday, January 6, 13, 20, 27 & February 3 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Meditation provides us with a clear stable mind, necessary for a happy life as well as the foundation for deepening our spiritual journey. This condensed 5-week course offers hands-on experience with the basic elements of meditation using breath, posture, and techniques for coping with distractions and laxity of the mind. Free. Donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Practical Buddhism with Gelek Rimpoche • Tuesday, January 7, 14, 21 28, February 4, 11, 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25, April 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Practical Buddhism offers video recordings of earlier teachings by Gelek Rimpoche as an opportunity for some to revisit and as an introduction for others. A panel discussion with Jewel Heart Instructors follows each session. Discussions are not recorded. Sessions review Gelek Rimpoche's 2012 Sunday talks and into early 2013. Online only. FREE, donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

SEM: The Nature of Mind with Elizabeth Hurwitz & Helen Breault • Wednesday, January 8, 15, 22, 29, February 5, 12, 26, March 5, 12 & 19 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • This course addresses the relationship between energy and mind, the mind's capacity for liberation and wisdom, and continuity of consciousness. It also highlights the mind as an object of concentrated mediation. Discussion group format including concentrated and analytical meditation and presentation. FREE to members. Non-member donation $50. No one is turned away, pay what you can. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Buddhist Art as a Vehicle of Enlightenment with Glenn Mullin • Saturday, January 11 & 18 • 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. An immersive and experiential experience into the forms of art used as meditational tools in various Buddhist traditions around the world, with special emphasis on the use of sound, movement, and the visual arts; including the use of visualized art forms used in mandala meditation for arousing the primordial mind of natural enlightenment. Online only. $120 Jewel Heart Members/$150 Non-Members. Pay what you can—no one turned away. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Chanting for World Peace with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Monday, February 3 through Saturday, February 8 • 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. • A week-long kido chanting and purification service for repentance, peace in the world, and happiness for all beings. Open to all. Donation-based. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Parinirvana Service with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Sunday, March 16 • 10 to 11:30 a.m. • A special service to celebrate the Buddha's passing into Parinirvana. Donations welcome. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Ceremonies, Celebrations, and Rituals

Guru Bhakti Retreat: Honoring the Life of Paramahansa Yogananda with Naren K. Schreiner and Lopamudra Bose • Friday, March 6 through Sunday, March 9 • This weekend we honor the upcoming mahasamadhi commemorations of both Paramahansa Yogananda and Swami Sri Yukteswar. Special services include chanting and meditation, a recording of Yogananda's voice, a traditional Indian 'Arti', hatha yoga, Guru Gita scripture reading and more, along with delicious meals and personal time. $150. For more information contact Song of the Morning at (989) 983-4107, email office@songofthemorning.org, or visit songofthemorning.org.

Vernal Equinox Celebration with the Michigan Friends Center • Thursday, March 20 • 5:30 to 9:00 p.m. • We will celebrate the balance of light and dark and the birth of spring with a potluck and fire circle. Bring a dish to share and your own place setting.
For the circle bring a verse, a story, a song, seasonal lore, or a readiness to partake in what others have brought. What is this season saying to you? FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact the Michigan Friends Center at (734) 475-1892 or email manager@mfcenter.org.

Dances of Universal Peace, Spring Equinox with Susan Slack • Saturday, March 22 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Dances of Universal Peace are interactive chanting while moving in a simple folk-dance circle taught by certified leaders to live

SUZY WIENCKOWSKI is

a Master in the Usui System of Reiki Healing and a Certified Trager Practitioner. She has been involved in the healing arts since 1979 with Reiki being the focus of her work since 1993. Initiated by Libby Barnett, Wienckowski's training includes study with two Masters who were initiated by Hawayo Takata and with Hiroshi Doi, a member of the Usui Reiki Ryoho Gakkai in Japan.

A member of the Reiki Alliance, Wienckowski offers training in the 1st and 2nd degree, empowering others to bring the gifts of Reiki practice into their lives for self-healing and offering a healing touch to others. Individual treatment sessions are also available.

For more information about Suzy Wienckowski, her practice, or teaching, call (734) 476-7958 or email SuzyReiki@aol.com.

WIENCKOWSKI WILL BE SPEAKING ABOUT REIKI IN THE CW MINDFUL EXPLORATION SERIES, IN THE CRAZY WISDOM MEETING ROOM ON THURSDAY, MARCH 13. SEE THE CALENDAR LISTING UNDER THE "REIKI" HEADING ON PAGE 93.

music. No experience is required—we"ll patiently demonstrate songs from the world's spiritual traditions that point to peace, love, and joy, especially in this time of new life. Come solo or bring a friend or three. $10 suggested. For more information visit slacksusan.wixsite.com

Spring Equinox with Esther Kennedy • Sunday, March 23 • 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. • Come and welcome the return of spring with story, song, and gratitude. FREE. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Channeling

Evenings with Aaron & Barbara Brodsky • Wednesday, January 29, February 26, March 26 & April 23 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Evenings with Aaron meets once a month. All are welcome. Aaron has met with us regularly since 1989. In this gathering, Aaron often will address a present world issue and how we can best support the resolution of this issue from a place of loving awareness. Suggested donation: $10-$30-single; $40-$120-all. For more information contact the Deep Spring Center at (734) 477-5848, email om@deepspring.org, or visit deepspring.org.

Remembering Wholeness: Darshan with The Mother & Barbara Brodsky • Friday, February 21, March 21 & May 16 • 2 to 5:00 p.m. • The Mother, channeled by Barbara Brodsky, offers group and personal messages helping to gently release and reveal places where people are a little bit stuck. They reveal themselves when held deeply with love. Suggested donation: $10-$30-single; $30-$90-all. For more information contact the Deep Spring Center at (734) 477-5848, email om@deepspring.org, or visit deepspring.org.

Death and Dying

Death Café with Rev. Annie Kopko & Susan Thompson • Tuesday, January 7, February 4, March 4 & April 1• 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • A discussion group, rather than a grief-support group or a counseling session, with no agenda, objectives, or themes. Hosted on ZOOM. FREE, donations accepted. For more information visit Interfaithspirit.org.

Ann Arbor Death Café with Rachel Briggs, Diana Cramer & Merilynne Rush • Saturday, January 18, February 15, March 15, April 19, May 17 • 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • After a 4½ year hiatus, we meet again at Crazy Wisdom on the third Saturday of every month! Join us in-person for conversation about all things related to death and dying. This is not a grief support group, rather a "death positive" event. Participants join in small and large group discussion with deep listening and sharing from the heart. No agenda, no presentation. Coffee available; bring your own snack. FREE. For more info visit DeathCafe.com.

End-of-life Doula Training with Merilynne Rush • Wednesday, January 22, 29, February 5, 12, 19 & 26 OR Tuesday, April 1, 8, 15, 22, 29 & May 6 • 4 to 7:30 p.m. • Learn from an experienced doula and hospice nurse and a diverse team of facilitators. 100-page study guide includes resources on how to set up a business. No prior experience necessary. We emphasize practical aspects of caregiving and addressing the whole person and their "family." Additional mentoring and continuing education offered. $725; scholarships available. For more information contact Merilynne at (734) 395-9660, email thedyingyear@gmail.com, or visit thedyingyear.org.

Advance Care Planning Facilitator Training with Merilynne Rush • Wednesday, April 16 • 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Learn how to assist healthy adults identify a healthcare advocate and discuss their values and wishes with them. For nurses, doctors, social workers, chaplains, administrators, end-of-life doulas, and all healthcare professionals across the continuum of care. Advance registration required. $265, includes online learning modules. For more information contact Merilynne at (734) 395-9660, email thedyingyear@gmail.com, or visit thedyingyear.org.

Drumming

Drummunity Circle with Lori Fithian • Saturday, January 18, February 15, March 15 & April 19 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Come join us for drumming, singing, and maybe even dancing. All ages welcome, drums provided or bring your own. This is a family-friendly event with a focus on fun rhythm games and community-building activities. No experience expected! FREE, $5 suggested donation. For more information contact Lori at (734) 426-7818 or email lorifithian@mac.com.

Unite with Your Heartbeat with Yuliya Koval • Sunday, February 23 • 4 to 6:00 p.m. • Come home to your heartbeat with this sacred drum circle and healing journey. Let the drum guide you to a place of peace. Like waves on a shore, each beat washes away the day's worries, bringing you back to your natural rhythm. Together, we'll create a safe haven where healing happens naturally. This Sacred Circle Offers: traditional drumming meditation, sound healing vibrations, heart-centered breathing practices, and nurturing group energy. Perfect for those seeking inner peace, stress relief, and those ready to experience deep relaxation. $45. For more information visit yuliyasnaturals.com.

14th Annual Drum & Dance Jam with Curtis Glatter • Saturday, April 5 & May 3 • 7:30 p.m. • Drumming is proven to be good for hand-eye coordination and cognition, stress relief, enhancing spiritual joy and improving musicality in all ages! Bring a drum or use one provided. No experience necessary. $5 Donation Requested. For more information contact the Interfaith Center at (734) 972-6098 or visit interfaithspirit.org.

SIMPLY NATURAL BUSINESS:

Practices For Creative and Spiritual People

By Dr. Monalise Chinn

Many creative and spiritual people shy away from starting or growing a business. This is unfortunate because we all benefit when more heart-centered people are active in the marketplace. Some of the reasons business can seem like a "no" have to do with hustle culture, corporate culture, and the general "vibes" of doing business.

The truth is we need different practices that align with our natural rhythms (instead of working non-stop). We need practices that build community and support networks instead of the way large, anonymous, multi-national corporations view humans as only consumers. And lastly, we need to step into the "vibes" or feeling of doing business which takes time and doesn't provide that instant jolt of bliss that can come from a studio painting session, ecstatic dance party, or deep transcendent meditation experience.

I – Honoring Our Natural Rhythms

Banish hustle culture and detangle it from success. The idea of working 24/7 to build a business or after work on your "side-hustle" has become almost synonymous with entrepreneurship. So much so that people will avoid going into business, because the core belief is "I'll have to sacrifice" my studio time, my time on the cushion, or just down time with friends, family, or myself.

The underpinnings of hustle culture are tied to rapid, fast-paced growth and scaling a business to its maximum potential. Basically, getting as big as possible as fast as possible is the rationale behind hustling, and you don't see those promoting this strategy questioning it at all.

What if slow growth and a small to medium size business is more what success looks like for many of us? This is the question that those starting out, or focused on growth, need to ask themselves. What does a day in the life look like running a creative or spiritual business? When you know the answer to these questions, what it can take to get there appears much closer than the nebulous working non-stop to get to an unknown, ever moving target. That old "race to nowhere" can stop.

When we approach business in this way, it becomes more enjoyable and sustainable. We can create businesses that develop in cycles and in rhythm with our life. Our activities can also increase or decrease based on time of year, time in life, our own health, and what's happening with those we love.

Many creative and spiritual people shy away from starting or growing a business. This is unfortunate because we all benefit when more heart-centered people are active in the marketplace.

II – Honoring Our Community

Many are turned off by the dehumanizing business tactics used by multinational corporations and the onslaught of online ads targeting us so effectively. We have too many examples of people doing business with egoic, selfish motives—so much so that we can buy into the belief that this is what business is.

But it doesn't have to be—and it didn't used to be. If we go back far enough, business within small communities was inherently fair and based on equitable exchange. Because everyone knew each other and if you were doing something unfair or dishonest, you were outed and probably out of business for it!

I think we can return to that, especially small businesses or solopreneurs, because it just feels better *and* works better. I think we can return to this more natural way of doing business: focusing on quality, long term relationships, especially for small businesses or solopreneurs, just feels and works better. It just makes business more natural, less gross, and less awkward!

The focus should be on building relationships with like hearted people. That's it. It's that simple.

When you are focused on connecting with people you like, it feels like being a normal human. You can feel your whole nervous system relax into being natural, yourself, and authentic, real, instead of putting on your "I'm doing business hat" or often a mask.

The focus should be on building relationships with like hearted people. That's it. It's that simple.

III - Honoring the Energy of Business

Doing business can feel qualitatively different from creating art or tapping into higher spiritual realms. Dancing, painting, meditating, or chanting can, at times, feel transcendental. While sometimes exhilarating and fulfilling, business is inherently an earthly thing…more like planting a garden than touching the divine.

Much like putting a seed in the dirt, nourishing and watering your business *can* feel rich and worthwhile. We are often sold the misconception that entrepreneurship, especially in the digital age, is a tale as old as time—a way to get rich quick—but being a business owner might not give us that quick jolt of inspiration we might be expecting or wanting. In reality, it takes time to refine, nurture, and cultivate a successful business.

Businesses need respect and attention so that earthly, embodied richness, although slower and small at first, can fulfill us. It is not meant to take us to the height energetically that an ecstatic dance or shamanic drum class does. Understanding this helps us relax into what business is and how it can be an important part of one's life.

Want support finding enjoyment in creating or growing your business? Dr. Monalise Chinn provides Mental Wellness & Business Support locally in Ann Arbor and Online at Monalise.Art. She also hosts a marketing podcast, The Visible Creative, for spiritual and creative business owners.

Energy and Healing

Wild Goose Chi Kung with Master Wasentha Young • Tuesday, January 7, 14, 21, 27, February 4, 11, 18, 23, March 4, 11, 18, 25, 3, April 1 & 8 from 6 to 7:00 p.m. OR Thursday, January 9, 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 27, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3 & 10 from 10 to 11:00 a.m. • The Wild Goose Form, a series of continuous movements that includes the use of imagery, yogic like stretching, touching acu-points, and engaging with universe, nature, and earth energies. Tuesday classes are hybrid and Thursday class are in-person. $215. For more information contact the Peaceful Dragon School at (734) 741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

Healing & Ascension Monthlies Series with Rev. Eve Wilson • Thursday, January 30, February 27, March 27 & April 24 • 7:30 to 9:30 • Ascend body, emotion, mind, and soul into unity with Higher Self. Build your new world "muscles" as you learn to co-create your life and health through your new unity. Work in unconditional love for the greater good with Eve Wilson, Master Healer/World Ascension Worker to help the world to heal and ascend. Meet every four Thursdays by teleconference. $300 or $50 each for the full series of six. For more information contact Eve at (734) 780-7635, email evew@spiritualhealers.com, or visit spiritualhealers.com.

Essential Oils

Experience Essential Oils with Yulia Koval • Sunday, April 27 • 4 to 6:30 p.m. • Are you curious about the mysterious world of essential oils? Let's explore these precious plant treasures together in an intimate, hands-on experience where every scent tells a story. Discover: the fascinating history of aromatherapy across cultures, how essential oils are mindfully sourced and extracted, the properties of different oils, the science behind scent and emotional well-being, the art of blending for purpose and pleasure, and practical ways to incorporate oils into daily life. $45. For more information visit yuliasnaturals.com.

Exercise and Fitness

Franklin Method® Fridays with Suzanne Willets Brooks • Ongoing Fridays • 1 to 2:00 p.m. • This evidence-based class will vary in topics from pelvic floor, spinal movement, shoulder girdle, knees, feet, and balancing. A true body-mind experience, we will explore bone rhythms, muscle, fascia, organs, and our nervous system. Come ready to move, learn and explore and see how your mind can change your body. $40 drop in $35 for members. For more information contact Move Wellness at (734) 224-2560.

Self-Care Sunday for Women with Verapose Yoga & Meditation House, HIIT Happy & Pulse Nutrition • Sunday, January 5, February 2, March 2 & April 6 • 9 to 10:30 a.m. OR 11 to 12:30 p.m. • We are collaborating for a super fun event, and we'd love for you to be a part of it! The day contains a 30-minute Interval Workout, 30-minute gentle Yin Yoga with a Guided Meditation, and 30-minute nutrition education with a Protein shake. Time for gathering/sharing as a community at the end. $45. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Winter is a glorious spectacle of glittering fractals complete with a soundscape and atmosphere entirely its own.
— Anders Swanson

Move With Us: Traeger Mentastics with Paola Bardell • Thursday, January 8, February 6, March 6, April 4 & May 1 • 10 to 10:45 a.m. • This gentle form of movement is low key and focused on helping the nervous system to release restrictive patterns. Wear comfy clothing for movement. Paola will also share with you about the table sessions that she offers. $12. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

$1 Intro to Bounce / Rebounding with Laney Lane & Sarah Kreiner • Wednesday, January 15 from 5:30 to 6:15 p.m. OR Saturday, February 8 from 9 to 9:45 a.m. • Learn all you need to get started with rebounding—also known as a mini trampoline workout. They are low impact and so much fun! You'll leave feeling ready to jump into our Bounce classes at The Mix Studios or purchase your own for home. Only $1. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

All about Strength Training with Sarah Kreiner • Saturday, January 18 & 25 • Noon to 1:15 p.m. • This workshop is designed to help you learn what you need to strength train safely and effectively. Whether you have been working out for a while or are just starting, you'll learn form, intensity, exercise selection, and more! $60. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Now Hiring: Ad Sales Associate

Crazy Wisdom Community Journal is looking for an Ad Sales Associate. This is a great job for someone who is looking for very part-time work from home (and around town), loves Crazy Wisdom and the Crazy Wisdom Journal, and is happily interwoven into the Ann Arbor area. This could be perfect for someone who naturally makes friends and has relationships and connections from daily living here: shopping, playdates with kids or pets, taking dance or yoga classes, attending events, going out to eat, belonging to various singing, religious, reading, or athletic groups in the area—just being an active part of the community!

The job averages 6 hours per week (with an ebb and flow during our 4-month publishing cycle). Help to maintain our print/digital advertising base and build it up. Experience in sales, especially Ad Sales, would be a great plus, though the right attitude is even more important.

$25 per hour base pay, plus solid commission fees above a certain level of ad revenue. **Room to grow the base pay** (and the commisions).

In this role you will be oriented and trained by our Ad Sales Manager, Tana Dean, and by our publisher, Bill Zirinsky. This would be a fun and satisfying job for someone who believes in what we do and would like to join our team.

Please send cover note, and resume to: billz@crazywisdom.net.

Balanced Brain & Body with Katy Held • Saturday, February 1 • 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. • Adults of all ages, come join us for a fun and engaging playshop of movements and rhythmic passing games. Work your whole brain, body, sense of balance, and destress! Can be done standing or seated). Perfection is not required; fun and laughter is the goal! $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Pelvic Power with Suzanne Willets Brooks • Saturday, February 15 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • The evidence-based Franklin Method® pelvic power class will help you understand and embody the anatomy of the pelvis, hip joints, sacrum, and the pelvic floor. We will use Dynamic neurocognitive imagery, proprioception, and efficient movement patterning to help you move with more ease and feel at home in your body. $100. For more information contact Suzanne (734) 323-9664 or email suzannebodywise@gmail.com.

MOVE Well in Midlife Program with Elaine Economou • Monday February 17, 20, 24, 27, March 3, 6, 10, 13, 17 & 20 OR April 21, 24, 28, May 1, 5, 8, 12, 15, 19 & 22 • 5:30 p.m. A six-week movement program tailored for women moving through the menopause transition. Build a safe, targeted, and effective strength routine alongside peers in a supportive environment. We've planned everything to help you navigate this transition with confidence. $594. For more information contact office@movewellness.com.

Liberate Your Shoulders, Arms & Hands with Suzanne Willets Brooks & Recentered Pilates • Saturday, March 15 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • In this evidence-based Franklin Method® workshop, we will explore the anatomy of the shoulder girdle, arms, and hands. We will embody our bones, muscle, and fascia through imagery, movement, proprioception, and touch. We express, push, pull, hang, and create with our arms. Learn how to keep this powerful part of our body moving with efficiency. $100. For more information contact Suzanne (734) 323-9664 or email suzannebodywise@gmail.com.

Balance and the Vestibular System with Suzanne Willets Brooks • Saturday, April 12 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • In this evidence-based Franklin Method workshop, we will explore balance and its connection to your ears, eyes, and nervous system. Balance depends on proprioception and our other senses. We will use movement, touch, exercise balls, and resistance bands to help clarify our senses, create better bone rhythms, and muscular connections. For more information contact Suzanne (734) 323-9664 or email suzannebodywise@gmail.com.

THE CRAZY WISDOM CALENDAR

Festivals and Fairs

Enlightened Soul 2-Day Psychic Fair with Amy Garber • Ongoing First and Third Weekends • Saturday from Noon to 6: 00 p.m., Sunday from Noon to 5:00 p.m. • Join us for a fun-filled day! We have a selection of readers and healers for your enjoyment, along with visiting vendors for shopping! A great way to explore a variety of readings and healings at one time, under one roof. Events include intuitive tarot and oracle card readings, psychic reading, mediums, energy healers, and spirit art. Saturday $5 and Sunday $3. For more information contact Amy at (734) 358-0218, email amy@enlightenedsoulcenter.com, or visit enlightenedsoulcenter.com.

Film

Free Film & Discussion with Jewel Heart Instructors • Friday, January 10, February,14, March 14,and April 11 • 7 to 9:15 p.m. • *Aftersun,* 2022. Sophie reflects on the shared joy and private melancholy of a holiday she took with her father twenty years earlier. Memories real and imagined fill the gaps between as she tries to reconcile the father she knew with the man she didn't.

• *Don't Look Up,* 2021. Two low-level astronomers must go on a giant media tour to warn humankind of an approaching comet that will destroy planet Earth. Don't Look Up demonstrates how not listening to Science can turn out. FREE, concessions available. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

• *Take Shelter,* 2012. Plagued by a series of apocalyptic visions, a young husband and father questions whether to shelter his family from a coming storm or from himself. FREE, concessions available.

• *Melancholia,* 2012. Despite all best efforts, a marriage celebration becomes a fiasco with family tensions mounting and relationships fraying. Meanwhile, a planet is heading directly at earth, threatening the very existence of humankind.

Healing

Warrior's Journey 2025: Saving Your Liver (and more!) with Durga Devi • January Through June • 10:00 a.m. • This six-month-long course includes online Monthly content:Asana, Meditation, Pranayama, Detoxes and Rejuvenation with Food as Medicine.You may choose to add Personal Coaching (Monthly 1-hour sessions, with weekly check-ins) Select the Coaching option when you register. $1,008. For more information visit houseofyogavirtual.com.

Healing and the Ever-Healed Workshop via Zoom with Barbara Brodsky, Aaron, The Mother, Tavis Taylor & John Orr • Saturday, February 8 through Thursday, February 13 • 10 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. & 3:30 to 6:00 p.m. • For many centuries we have been in a transitional phase of human consciousness. Right now, we're at a tipping point, preparing to shift into what will come next. Our intention is that through this workshop you find a more stable way to rest in your own divine center and release the distortion within yourself and the Earth. Suggested donation: $180-$660. For more information contact the Deep Spring Center at (723) 477-5848, email om@deepspring.org, or visit deepspring.org.

Client Appreciation Day & 10th Anniversary Open House Celebration with Rob Meyer Kukan and Notes Natural Health • Saturday, April 26 • 2 to 5:00 p.m. • You are invited to a spring Open House to celebrate 7 Notes! Are you a current client? Are you a new client? Are you curious and hope to be a client? This day is for you! Come, check out our offerings, learn about what 7 Notes Natural Health is all about, and celebrate our tenth anniversary! FREE. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Herbal Medicine

Herbal & Natural Medicine Series with Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal & Natural Medicine • Saturday, January 4 & 11 • Noon to 2:00 p.m. • We are offering an open house to come by and learn about our year-long Herbal and Natural Medicine Series beginning January 18. Meet Mary Light and browse the apothecary, we are open to your questions! RSVP required. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Yuliya Koval on Herbs • Thursday, February 6 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join us for a casual evening of fun and entertainment while preparing a healthy herbal tonic. During this event, you will learn about basic herbal mixes, foraging techniques, optimal harvesting times, and interesting methods for herb preservation. Yuliya, who incorporates practices passed down from her ancestors, will share her knowledge and experiences gained over generations. For more information contact Yulia at ykoval7@yahoo.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Holistic Health

Reawakening the Mind-Body-Mother Earth Connection with Robin Lily Goldberg • Monday, January 27, February 3 & 10 • 6 to 7:00 p.m. • This experiential series explores our vastness and interconnectedness. From reflexology to polyvagal theory, we'll rediscover how inner networks like the nervous system communicate with the natural world. By tracing our ties to the Earth, we can remember our wholeness and revive our sense of belonging. $32. For more information contact Robin Lily at robinlily@outlook.com or visit aurily.com.

JACKIE MILLER is a certified breathwork and decision processing facilitator. After training in Sydney in 2009, Miller opened a practice in Oregon in 2010 and returned to her Michigan roots in 2014. Miller's breathwork optimizes resolving difficult emotions and past experiences through a technique that activates a non-ordinary state of body and mind. This opens space for self-healing to naturally unfold. Her approach is also informed by bioenergetics and spiritual chaplaincy. Miller trained in Theravada Buddhist monasteries for five years, and is a long-time community organizer for carceral abolition, and for global justice. She would love to connect with others looking to work at the intersections of healing arts, Buddhist practice, or social justice organizing. Check out her free group breathwork sessions, offered twice a month.

Learn more about Miller and her practice at thisbreath.com, or call (734) 883-7130, or email jackie@thisbreath.com.

Miller will be speaking about Breathwork in the CW Mindful Exploration series, in the Crazy Wisdom Meeting Room on Thursday, March 20. See the listing in the calendar under the "Breathwork" heading on page 88.

Intuitive and Psychic Development

Focused Mind Meditation: Teleconference with John Friedlander • Sunday, January 5, February 2, March 2 & April 6 • 9:00 a.m. to Noon • Development of sustained focused meditation makes it easy to develop a whole new magnitude of psychic skill and healing ability. You will also gain a whole new level of mental clarity and spiritual openness. $15. For more information contact Violeta at (734) 476-1513 or visit psychicpsychology.org.

Psychic Psychology Women's Group: Teleconference with John Friedlander & Gloria Hemsher • Tuesday, January 7, February 4, March 4 & April 1 • 7:00 p.m. • For Women Only; meditations concentrating on women's issues relative to biological energies as well as that of the aura. $10. For more information contact Violeta at (734) 476-1513 or visit psychicpsychology.org.

Winter Intensive Webinar & Teleconference with John Friedlander • Thursday, January 16 & Friday, January 17 from 7 to 9:00 p.m., Saturday, January 18 & Sunday, January 19 from 10:00 a.m. to Noon & 2 to 4:00 p.m. • New material introduced with continued development of advanced and core techniques, seeking a natural sense of skill in everyday life. Prerequisite: Level 1 Psychic Development class, CD set or by permission of instructor. $275. For more information contact Gilbert at gchoud@yahoo.com or visit psychicpsychology.org.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Dr. Monalise Chinn on Intuitive Awareness • Thursday, February 27 • 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The Art of Discernment: Learn how intuition and understanding the emotional guidance system can make decision-making easier. This seminar will help with moving beyond the linear and logical to whole body awareness when choosing our next steps. Using this awareness and putting it into practice can result in more fulfilling and heart-centered living. For more information contact Yulia at ykoval7@yahoo.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Spring Intensive Webinar & Teleconference with John Friedlander • Thursday, April 10 & Friday April 11 from 7 to 9:00 p.m., Saturday, April 12 & Sunday, April 13 from 10:00 a.m. to Noon & 2 to 4:00 p.m. • New material introduced with continued development of advanced and core techniques, seeking a natural sense of skill in everyday life. Prerequisite: Level 1 Psychic Development class, CD set or by permission of instructor. $275. For more information contact Gilbert at gchoud@yahoo.com or visit psychicpsychology.org.

Massage

Visit & Observe a Massage School with the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine • Ongoing Thursdays & Fridays, January 9 through February 28 • 11 to 11:30 a.m. • Entering a professional program is an important decision for the student and for the school! You will gather information about our clinic services, prices, and scheduling. We invite those considering a career in bodywork, massage, and the healing arts (including herbal medicine), to drop in on a class. RSVP required. FREE. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

Demonstration of Supine Massage with Patti Steven • Friday, January 10 • 11 to 11:45 a.m. • Patti Stephen, LMT and AASM faculty, will demonstrate a half hour anterior massage in a quiet setting in our studio with some brief narration. A great opportunity to observe a half hour massage session, Q & A to follow. FREE. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

Observe a Prone Massage with the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine • Friday, February 7 • 11 to 11:45 a.m. • Oh those tense shoulders! That pain in your lower leg! All this and some great cranial work can be done prone. Observe a professional LMT faculty demonstrate a half hour of posterior bodywork with our class in the studio! RSVP in advance please. FREE. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Denise Held on Reflexology • Thursday, March 27 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Denise Held, RN and foot reflexologist, will introduce the fundamentals of foot reflexology and discuss its potential health benefits. She will explain Reflexolo-chi™, the unique technique she practices, and offer a sample hands-on session for those interested. For more information contact Denise at denisebheld@gmail.com or email events@crazywisdom.net.

TMJ Massage Demonstration with Patti Steven • Friday, April 4 & May 2 • 10 to 10:30 a.m. • Patti Stephen, LMT and long-term dental professional, will offer two demos for guests and students to observe on resolving and approaching TMJ tension. FREE. For more information contact the Ann Arbor School of Massage, Herbal, and Natural Medicine at (734) 769-7794.

Meditation

Guided Meditation for Healing & Growth with Mara Evenstar • Ongoing Thursdays • 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. • Feel more grounded, centered, and embodied while expanding your consciousness and disciplining your mind. These meditations will also support your ability to stabilize and maintain access to your sense of well-being and resilience. Great for beginners or as a complementary experience to more advanced practitioners of other disciplines. Donation based. For more information contact Mara at Mara@evenstarschalice.com or visit evenstarschalice.com.

MINDFUL EXPLORATIONS

Thursday Evening Talks
at Crazy Wisdom
In the CW Meeting Room Upstairs.
7-8:30pm.
Free. No sign-up required.

Tarot without Mystery with Leif Laufeyjarsen, January 9

Nikki Nanos on Art as Mindfulness, January 16

Self-Compassion for Parents with Joy Aleccia, January 23

Rob Meyer-Kukan on Sound Healing, January 30

Yuliya Koval on Herbs, February 6

Dr. Katherine Munter on Art Therapy, February 20

Dr. Monalise Chinn on Intuitive Awareness, February 27

Suzy Wienckowski on Reiki, March 13

Jackie Miller on Breathwork, March 20

Denise Held on Reflexology, March 27

For descriptions of the talks, and bios for the presenters, look in our Calendar section, which starts on page 86.

For more information, you can also email: events@crazywisdom.net.

Crazy Wisdom is located at 114 South Main Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48104 (734-665-2757) www.crazywisdom.net and www.crazywisdomjournal.com

Dances of Universal Peace

Return to Ann Arbor

By Susan Slack

There is a growing activity, migrating from one country to another, across each continent step-by-step, village to village, from one neighborhood to another. It's not a religion or a secret society. It is just plain folks gathering for a time to chant and sing while gently moving together in a circle to live music.

The international practice known as Dances of Universal Peace takes place right here in Ann Arbor. The Dances of Universal Peace (DUP) was offered here for years but dissipated during the pandemic. Now, with a new leader in town and a new location, like-minded folks are again finding one another for an evening, four times a year near the solstices and equinoxes.

Anthropologists suggest that both our physical brains and our societies, the ones that have lasted thousands of years, co-evolved together in part through communal singing and dancing. Rhythm and music have been a part of almost every enclave of civilization since before recorded history. Unfortunately, most mainstream Americans haven't been provided with opportunities for these gatherings—well, except at weddings and drum circles.

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Then, in 1960s San Francisco, along came Samuel Lewis. He had spent his life traveling, providing advice on better farming methods in rural communities world-wide, and meeting with remarkable teachers. One of his later advisors was modern dance pioneer Ruth St. Dennis. Biographers suggest his most inspired meeting was with Indian musician and Sufi Master Inayat Khan. "Sufi Sam", as he was sometimes known, showed up in Golden Gate Park one day with a few young hippies and the Dances of Universal Peace rekindled a space for the ancient practice of communal circles. The practice allows for bonding hearts and minds, dissolving cares in the safety of the circle, and being with others in a peaceful, trusting, kind, and fun presence. And you are warmly invited to join in – no strings attached.

A good part of the experience is that you don't have to know anything before participating in the Dances of Universal Peace. Everything is simply taught before each dance by trained leaders. Who are they? Mostly volunteers who have apprenticed for a good long while and have agreed to ethical guidelines (to not take advantage of those who attend physically, monetarily, or psychically) to become a certified leader, eligible to use the circle of hearts logo. Each leader is required to have a mentor to check in with for friendship, advice, and to provide any corrections that may be needed. Because there are hundreds of dances that honor the beautiful spiritual paths of the Earth to choose from, a leader shares the dances that move them. Many times, a DUP circle will embrace a theme, season, or holiday. Leaders have access to the network of dance resources that expand their repertoires and support ongoing insights into world traditions.

That means participants may experience the fragrance of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Lakota, and Mayan in a single night. Short phrases in sacred languages from these spiritual traditions are taught which opens windows to wider world views. We learn through experience that humanity is one being longing to give, receive, and embody compassion, harmony, and beauty.

The practice allows for bonding hearts and minds, dissolving cares in the safety of the circle, and being with others in a peaceful, trusting, kind, and fun presence. And you are warmly invited to join in – no strings attached.

And the more we moderns learn about what makes our bodies, brains, and emotional selves function more fluently, the more miraculous—yes, miraculous—this practice appears to be. DUP movements are somatic, meaning that with prescribed arm positions, the body talks to itself, in unison with other dancers which in turn informs your entire self. For instance, chanting the name of the Hindu god Ram while holding arms in a "muscle man" position tells the dancer's whole being that they are strong.

Moving while singing integrates and stimulates the neocortex, or higher brain function, along with the older midbrain, and ancient lower brain stem, or medulla oblongata. DUP covers a full menu of what works best for a balanced, healthy life and open perspective. It helps with heartbeat, breathing, and blood pressure. Because many of the short songs are in other languages, or mantric, dancers do not have a preconceived notion of what they mean and how they should react. (Yes, leaders do usually offer loose translations to ensure that they lead to love and clarity.) The older languages vibrate in the body (chakras anyone?) to enliven and create harmony within and without.

And can we talk about the benefits of human touch? DUP involves holding hands and sometimes placing hands on shoulders or waists. Many studies, including from the National Institute of Health, report that touch substantially improves both physical and mental well-being via reduction of pain, anxiety, depression, and stress in adults. It strengthens the immune system, emotional security, and increases levels of dopamine and serotonin—the chill, happy, focusing neurotransmitters.

All this science stuff points to reasons why DUP is a good thing, but there is also an indescribable insight or growth that many have experienced, different for each participant. Or maybe not. Maybe you meet new friends; there are no expectations or compulsions. You may discover something very old or very new, or something more than what you already think.

Moving while singing integrates and stimulates the neocortex, or higher brain function, along with the older midbrain, and ancient lower brain stem, or medulla oblongata.

The Dances of Universal Peace are practiced around the world in over fifty countries, most recently spreading into South America, Turkey, and Vietnam. Visit the international website go to the "Find the Dances" tab, and you'll see a map. You can click on any part of the world and get contact information to find a dance circle as you travel. Each circle is part of the international network. There are weekend camps and on-line circles as well.

Everyone is welcome to join in at the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth in Ann Arbor on Saturday, March 22. No registration is required. Come solo or with a partner or a bunch of friends. Together we can accommodate any abilities. Relax into the live music, mantra-songs, and the ancient longing, requited at last, for the precious company of good hearts.

If you have an acoustic instrument, like flute, violin, guitar, accordion, or clarinet, (glockenspiel?), contact Susan to play in the circle. Guitar requires only a few chord changes and some strumming. Decorative violin and flute playing can be by ear. You might choose to play on only one or two tunes during the evening. It's a very fulfilling contribution to world peace.

Susan Slack is a local musician and author with 45 years of experience with Dances of Universal Peace. You can reach her at peaceinacircle@gmail.com or find more information on the DUP Facebook page at Ann Arbor Dances of Universal Peace at facebook.com/share/g/hfMrKMJMPeD2exLf.

New Year's Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Friday, January 3 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Start 2025 with an intention setting meditation and sound! Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation where he will use singing bowls, gongs, and more to create a gentle soundscape perfect for deep relaxation and peace. $40. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Meditation on Compassion with Khenpo Tshering Chophel • Saturday, January 4, 11, 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15, 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22, April 5, 12 & 26 • 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. • Meditating on compassion opens our hearts to genuinely care for all beings. Recognizing that everyone shares the wish to be happy and free from suffering, we practice broadening our focus beyond our own wellbeing. Ongoing; participants can attend whenever they wish; no prior meditation experience necessary. FREE, donations accepted. For more information contact Lama Nancy at (734) 649-2127, email lamanancy@karunabuddhistcenter.org, or visit karunabuddhistcenter.org.

White Tara Guided Healing Meditation with Jewel Heart Instructors • Sunday, January 5, 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6, 13, 20 & 27 • 9:30 to 10:35 a.m. • Tara is the mother goddess of Tibetan Buddhism, known for her quick and compassionate activity. White Tara is particularly associated with healing and long life. These guided meditations use visualization techniques to overcome physical, mental, and emotional suffering. FREE, donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Healing and Compassion Meditations with Hartmut Sagolla • Monday, January 6, 13, 20, 27, February 3, 10, 24, March 3, 10, 17, April 7, 14, 21 & 28 • Noon to 1:00 p.m. • Hartmut Sagolla leads a 30–40-minute guided meditation on a Buddhist theme followed by discussion. Meditations are centered around healing oneself and others and developing compassion. They include concentrated meditation, visualization, and contemplative meditations. FREE. Donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Introductory Meditation Class with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Series Begin Thursday, January 9, February 13 & March 13 • 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. • Each series is five Thursday evenings. The viewpoint of Zen is that life's every moment is fully lived and contains purpose in itself, not the means for something else. Held in the Temple's meditation hall, the course includes simple stretching exercises, breathwork, meditation postures, concentration, and mindfulness practice. $160 for the series. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Buddha's Enlightenment Sitting with Maum Gloria Cox • Friday, January 10 through Saturday, January 11 • 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. • Come and meditate to awaken to your true nature, inspired by Shakyamuni Buddha who sat under the Bodhi tree and came to freedom. Sit from 8 to 10:00 p.m. and/or 10 p.m. to midnight. After midnight, please stay until 4am. Bring an offering of flowers, fruit, candles, nuts, incense, dried fruit, or money for the altar. Everyone is welcome. Donations welcome. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

GOM Day of Meditation with Jewel Heart Instructors • Tuesday, January 25 & March 22 • 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Meditation is an essential tool that helps develop peace, joy, concentration, and wisdom. The day includes practice sessions with light guidance. Instructors are available for assistance. Silence will be enjoyed throughout. Come when you can. Free. Donations welcome. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

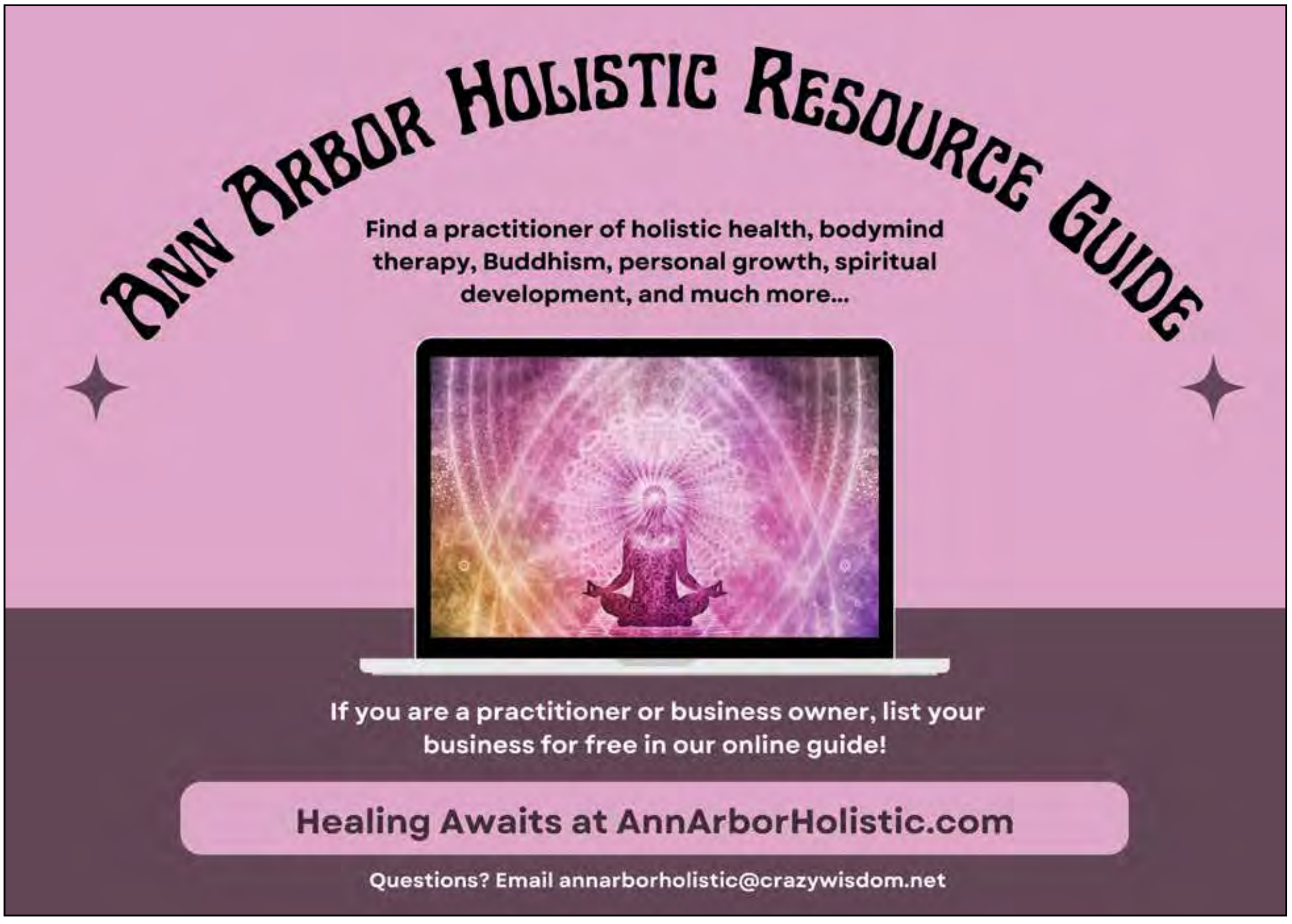
A Day of Mindfulness Meditation with Sister Esther Kennedy • Saturday, February & March 1 • 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. • Join our mindfulness community as we deepen our understanding of and commitment to daily meditation practice. Reflecting upon our relationships with honesty and courage, we amplify our capacity to be loved within family, neighborhood, city, and world. $35, lunch included. For more information, contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Mastering Meditation with Kapila Castoldi • Sunday, March 16, 23 & 30 • 2 to 4:00 p.m. • Introductory Meditation Series offered by the Sri Chinmoy Centre. Topics include concentration, relaxation, and breathing techniques; exploring meditation on the heart chakra; the awakening of inner awareness; the role of music and mantras. FREE. For more information contact Kapila at (734) 994-7114, email castoldi@oakland.edu, or visit meditationannarbor.com.

Nature's Harmony/Earth Day Sound Bath with Rob Meyer Kukan • Friday, April 11 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan at Breathe Yoga in Chelsea for a nature's harmony and earth day sound bath. $30. For more information contact Amy at (734) 883-7427, email amy@breatheyogachelsea.com, or visit breatheyogachelsea.com.

Music, Sound, and Voice

Folk Song Jam Along with Jean Chorazyczewski and Lori Fithian • Tuesday January 7 & March 4 & Wednesday, February 5 & April 2 • 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. • Bring your voices and/or any acoustic instrument to sing and play—just for fun! Choose from 300+ songs spanning genres, from ABBA to Seeger. We project lyrics & chords up on the screen so you can sing and/or play along: All instruments, voices and ages welcome! FREE. For more information contact Lori and Jean at (734) 678-6148 or email folksongjamalong@gmail.com.


Ann Arbor Holistic Resource Guide
Find a practitioner of holistic health, bodymind therapy, Buddhism, personal growth, spiritual development, and much more...
If you are a practitioner or business owner, list your business for free in our online guide!
Healing Awaits at AnnArborHolistic.com
Questions? Email annarborholistic@crazywisdom.net

THE CRAZY WISDOM CALENDAR

Music, Sound and Voice continued...

Didgeridoo Sound Therapy/Sound Bath with Harper & Midwest Kind • Saturday, January 11 • 5 to 6:30 p.m. • A workshop about the ancient Australian Aboriginal wind instrument called the "Didgeridoo" (Yidaki / Mako). They will discuss the many types of didgeridoos available, how they are made, played and their use in Indigenous ceremonies and healing followed by a sound bath experience. $50. For more information visit veraposeyoga.com.

Cafe 704 with Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth • Saturday, January 11, February 8, March 8 & April 12 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Live music in a smoke and alcohol-free venue, in person or livestream on Zoom. John Churchill and Peter Madcat Ruth (January 11), Sari Brown (February 8), Emily Slomovits and Friends, a tribute to Joni Mitchell (March 8), Kath Weider (April 12). $10. For more information visit interfaithspirit.org.

Sound Bath Experience with Katie Schroeder • Sunday, January 12 AND/OR Saturday, February 22 • 4 to 5:00 p.m. • Sound Bath begins with accessible yoga poses. Then you'll settle in and enjoy the calming sounds and vibrations of the singing bowls, tuning forks, and a rain disk. Our instructor uses the sound and her voice to help you wind down from the week, get cleared and energized for the week ahead. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Resonant Relaxation: Daytime Sound Bath with Rob Meyer- Kukan • Wednesday, January 15 & March 19 from 10 to 11:00 a.m. AND/OR Thursday, February 20, & April 17 from 1 to 2:00 p.m. • Are you a busy parent who loves sound baths but can't attend an event in the evening? Do you have a job that requires evening hours? Are you just plain busy? This hour-long sound bath is for you! $30. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Somatic Movement + Sound with Rob Meyer Kukan • Sunday, January 19 • 3 to 5:00 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for an afternoon of movement, release, and rest. We'll start with some breathwork to open our energy channels; eventually we'll add in somatic movement and vocal toning to target areas in the body that have stuck and release heavy emotions. It all ends with a loving and supportive sound bath. $45. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Rob Meyer-Kukan on Sound Healing • Thursday, January 30 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan of 7 Notes Natural Health in Ann Arbor for an engaging talk on sound therapy. Discover what sound therapy is, why it's so powerful, and observe a demonstration of a brief sound bath. FREE. For more information contact Rob at rob@robmeyerkukan.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Transformation and Renewal Candlelight Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Friday, January 31 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan at Breathe Yoga in Chelsea for a candlelight sound bath featuring the theme of transformation. $30. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Intro to Sound Therapy Workshop with Rob Meyer Kukan • Saturday, February 1 • 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • In this workshop we will explore how healing with sound works. Participants will learn the basics of sound, the history of sound therapy, the tools used in sound therapy, and the applications for group and individual use of sound therapy. $325. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Artwork by Mary Murphey

On January 1 , 2025,
The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal will be
availble on our website:
crazywisdomjournal.com.

Heart to Heart
Shamanic Healing
Animal Communication
Judy Liu Ramsey
Certified Animal Chaplain, Interspecies Counselor, Shamanic Practitioner
for information or appointment, contact: info@judyramsey.net
Website https://JudyRamsey.net
*Shamanic healing for people & animals
*Support for life changes, loss & grief
*Support for healing trauma & PTSD
*Classes in shamanic practice & animal communication
*Ceremony for clearing, healing, bonding

Ellen Craine
JD, LMSW-Clinical
& Macro,ACSW, INHC
Social Work Ethics
Consultant,
Grief Expert,
and Trainer
#l International Best Selling Author
ellen@crainecounselingcom • (248) 539-3850

Katie Hoener has been doing yoga for over half of her life! As with so many practices, her yoga practice has evolved with wisdom, age, and the times. Whereas once yoga was a place for strength and movement, her practice, in partnership with Courtney Fitzpatrick and through Verapose Yoga, has become a place of stillness, rest, and community.

Hoener utilizes her yoga practice to support her work in Community Mental Health, and hopes that all around her find their own sense of balance. The peace available in these spaces is limitless and available for each of us to find our way.

Katie Hoener is also the writer of our yoga column, ***Namaste, Katie***. Read it on page 26.

Photo by Heather Nash Photography

Community Sound Bath with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Friday, February 7 AND/OR April 4 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation where he will use singing bowls, gongs, and more to create a gentle soundscape perfect for deep relaxation and peace. Celebrate the Earth with the special Earth Day theme in April! $40. For more information contact Amy at (734) 883-7427, email amy@breatheyogachelsea.com, or visit breatheyogachelsea.com.

Cacao + Sound with Rob Meyer Kukan • Friday, February 14 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Join us for a special Valentine's Day themed, heart opening cacao ceremony supported by sacred sound. Using ceremonial grade cacao, pure intention, and over 40 different instruments, Rob will create an experience that will immerse you in peace and tranquility. $40. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Sound Bath Lessons Kick Off Event with Rob Meyer-Kukan • Friday, March 7 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Prepare your heart and mind for the arrival of spring! Join Rob Meyer-Kukan for this sound bath meditation where he will use singing bowls, gongs, and more to create a gentle soundscape perfect for deep relaxation and peace. $40. For more information contact Rob at (248) 962-5475, email contact@7notesnaturalhealth.com, or visit 7notesnaturalhealth.com.

Dreamscape Sound Bath with Rob Meyer Kukan • Friday, March 14 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Rob Meyer-Kukan at Breathe Yoga in Chelsea for a dreamscape-themed sound bath. $30. For more information contact Amy at (734) 883-7427, email amy@breatheyogachelsea.com, or visit breatheyogachelsea.com.

Pagan Spirituality

Witches Night out with Moira Payne • Wednesday, January 8, February 12, March 12, April 9 & May 14 • 6 to 8:00 p.m. • Join like-minded individuals to discuss upcoming events, share topics of interest, and answer questions. This is a judgment-free zone, open to everyone! Come to share, listen, learn, and enjoy the gorgeous new space upstairs at Crazy Wisdom. FREE. For more information contact Moira at (734) 846-2012 or email mopayne@umich.edu.

ConVocation 2025 with Christopher Penczak, Benebell Wen, Mat Auryn, Devin Hunter, Priestess Stephanie Rose Bird, and more • Thursday, February 20 at 5:00 p.m. through Sunday, February 23 at 4:00 p.m. • Come celebrate our 30th year at this all-inclusive event with drumming, rituals, hundreds of workshops, vending and art area, psychic readers, a masquerade ball, children's and teen program, and more. We offer classes on mystical and esoteric traditions for beginner to advanced during this 4-day event at the Ypsilanti Eagle Crest Hotel, 4007 Carpenter Rd, #383, Ypsilanti, MI 48197. $125. For more information visit ConVocation.org.

Parenting

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Joy Aleccia on Self-Compassion for Parents • Thursday, January 23 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join Joy Aleccia, MPH, Health Educator at the Washtenaw County Health Department, as we explore how we as parents can have more compassion for ourselves throughout our parenting journey and the impact this can have on our children. For more information contact Joy at joymaw@hotmail.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Peace

Peace Generator with Craig Harvey • Friday, January 17, February 21, March 21 & April 18 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Join our silent circle as we meditate on and pray for healing, miracles, and peace in ourselves and across the globe. Drop in at any time during this event. Donations gratefully accepted. For more information contact peacegenerator2001@gmail.com.

Personal Growth

Lunch & Learn with the Weber Center • Wednesday, January 15, February 12, March 14 & April 9 • 12:15 to 1:00 p.m. • Topics are as follows: January 15: Looking for Some New & Easy Recipes? February 12: Technology Update. March 14th Oh, My Aching Back! April 9: Spice Up Your Cooking! Bring your own lunch, drinks & dessert are provided. FREE, or $7 with the purchase of lunch from the center. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Karuna Buddhist Center

LOCATED IN DOWNTOWN ANN ARBOR

Led by Khenpo Tshering Chophel, Karuna Buddhist Center offers a blend of traditional Buddhist principles with a contemporary Western psychological mindset. Members are encouraged to set goals for their own spiritual path, whether they prefer a traditional or secular approach.

UPCOMING RETREATS AND PROGRAMS

- THE POWER OF MOTIVATION
  PUBLIC TALK, JANUARY 18, NOON
- BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH MEDITATION
  RETREAT AT TRIPLE CRANE, APRIL 18-20
- MEDITATION ON COMPASSION
  SATURDAYS, 10:30-11:30, ATTEND ANYTIME

karunabuddhistcenter.org

You Can Heal Your Pain

- Psycho-Spiritual Hypnotherapy
- Online or In Person
- Emotional and Spiritual Healing

Sherris Cottier Shank C.Ht.

BirminghamClinicalHypnotherapy.com

248-842-7783

Book Review

How Are You, Really?

By Christine MacIntyre

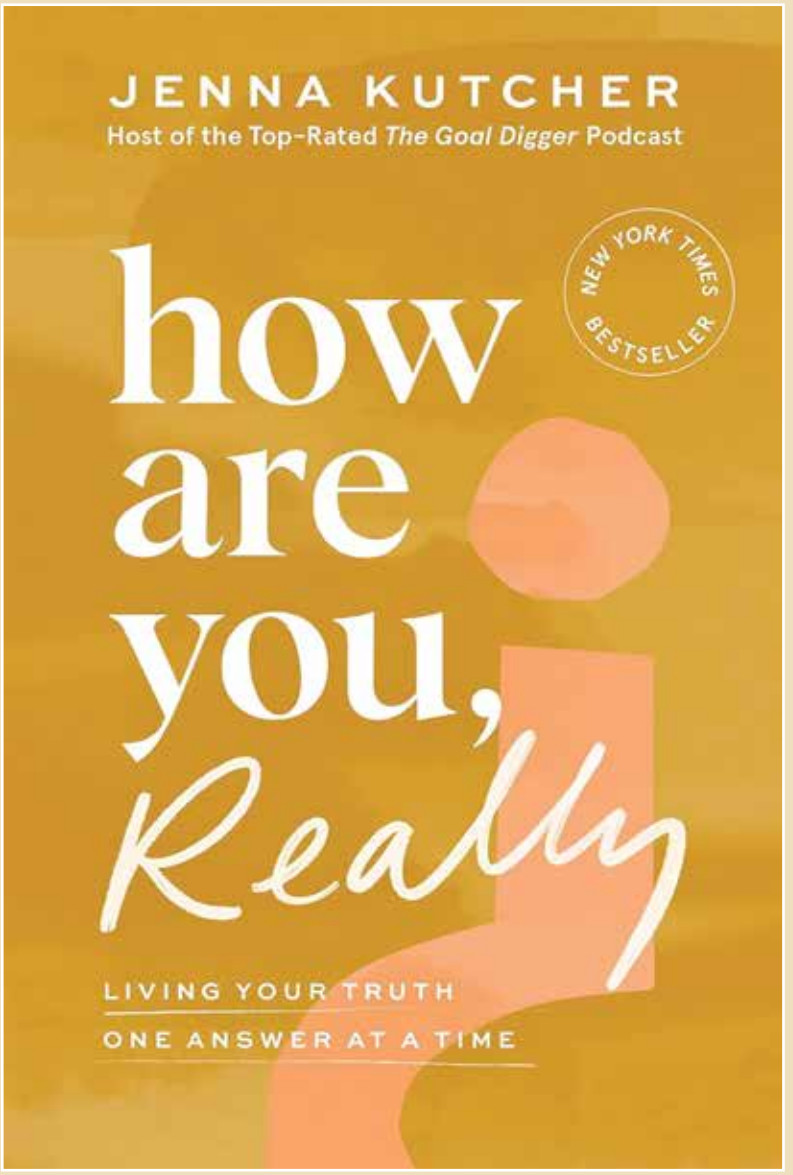
In *How Are You, Really?* Jenna Kutcher explores the often-overlooked question of how we are truly feeling. She encourages readers to reconnect with their authentic selves and live according to their values, joys, and rhythms rather than societal expectations. The book resonates deeply with people at various life stages, offering a much-needed invitation to stop and ask, "How are you, really?"

How often do we answer this query with a quick, "I'm fine?" Instead, Kutcher encourages readers to sit with that question and confront the discomfort that might come with it. This is a radical and profoundly personal challenge for many women who are so used to caring for others.

She shares, "The way we are living is not sustainable for a human soul. Constantly covering up who we are just means we inevitably get buried. We are not okay anymore with just *looking* like we're okay. We're not okay with pretending to feel okay."

Kutcher encourages readers to sit with that question and confront the discomfort that might come with it. This is a radical and profoundly personal challenge for many women who are so used to caring for others.

Kutcher challenges the traditional definition of a well-lived life, emphasizing that it is not one-size-fits-all and should be based on personal fulfillment. Kutcher, who has achieved tremendous success as an entrepreneur and podcast host, is candid when she says that money, fame, or outward accolades don't always equate to true fulfillment.


JENNA KUTCHER
Host of the Top-Rated *The Goal Digger* Podcast
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER
how are you, Really
LIVING YOUR TRUTH
ONE ANSWER AT A TIME

She writes, "If you want to be some*where,* some*thing,* or some*one,* but the process of getting there looks a thousand miles long, just get as close as you can."

Kutcher's journey becomes deeply relatable for women who often strive to "do it all"—to be the perfect mother, partner, employee, friend, and more. Her reframing of goal-digging and success reassures readers that collective actions—stating the passion, simplifying the plan, and starting the process—lead to massive change.

She suggests it's all about how you feel at the end of the day. Do you feel joy? Do you feel aligned with your values? Are you living a life that energizes you or running on empty? Further, she underscores the importance of ensuring a life that preserves your values. "When was the last time you felt 1,000 percent AMAZING? On top of the world? Vibrant, giddy, alive?"

She writes, "If you want to be somewhere, something, or someone, but the process of getting there looks a thousand miles long, just get as close as you can."

Kutcher's book is praised for its authenticity. She doesn't portray herself as having everything figured out. Instead, she opens up about her struggles with body image, grieving after miscarriages, and societal pressures. These stories deeply resonate, especially for women seeking realness. She offers practical tips, such as how to speak to ourselves or listen to our bodies and recognize what they need, that nudge us closer to a gentle acceptance of our whole selves and a more authentic feeling in life.

The book's raw honesty and reflections make it more than an abstract discussion of personal growth. It's an invitation to get vulnerable and recognize that the quest for perfection—whether with your body, career, or relationships—is not the answer to happiness.

Kutcher shares stories from her life, but she doesn't stop there. She also provides readers with tools and exercises to delve into their stories and begin the realignment process. Each chapter feels like a gentle guide, helping you pause, reflect, and recalibrate.

While the book is deeply reflective, it's also practical and empowering. Kutcher doesn't just offer philosophical insights, she provides readers with actionable tools to implement change.

While the book is deeply reflective, it's also practical and empowering. Kutcher doesn't just offer philosophical insights, she provides readers with actionable tools to implement change. From journaling prompts to thought-provoking questions and jump starters at the end of each chapter, she equips readers with the resources to realign their lives with their true desires.

A recurring exercise in the book is creating a vision for what you want your life to look like. Kutcher explains how to develop actionable steps to achieve those dreams. Readers will consider questions such as, "What do I want my life to look like five years from now?" and "What small changes can I make today to move closer to that vision?"

How Are You, Really? feels less like a theoretical book and more like a guidebook for personal growth. Kutcher gives readers the tools, but she also reminds them that the work won't be easy. It takes courage to look at one's life, see where things aren't working, and then make changes. She discusses everything from creating authentic communities to asking for help and investing in ourselves.

How Are You, Really? is a deeply personal, thought-provoking, and practical guide for women who are tired of living by the standards set by others and are ready to reclaim their definition of happiness. Kutcher's blend of vulnerability, wisdom, and actionable advice makes this book stand out among others in the self-help genre.

It's a book for women at any stage whether just starting their careers, deep into motherhood, or somewhere in between. The message is clear: life is the person's to shape, but each needs to ask themselves the hard questions, tune into what is wanted, and then have the courage to make changes.

Ultimately, *How Are You, Really?* isn't just about surface-level changes but about living with intention and joy. It's a must-read for women seeking fulfillment, peace, and authenticity. Ready to stop living on autopilot and start living fully? This book provides guidance, one honest conversation with the self at a time.

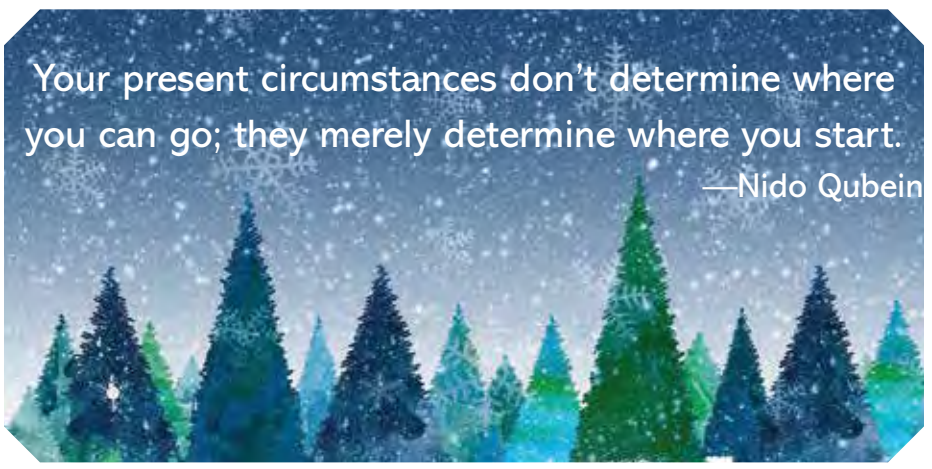
THE CRAZY WISDOM CALENDAR

Personal Growth continued...

Who's In Charge? Your Thoughts or You? With Nikki Nanos • Saturday, January 25 • 11:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. • Have a few negative thoughts rolling around? Through mindful activities and meditation, you will explore your relationship with your thoughts. Identify the loudest voice, who not only lives within you, but influences how you show up. Learn to recognize, befriend, and consciously make the choice to healthier thinking. $25, students $15. For more information contact Nikki (248) 210-3005, email nikki@nikkinanos.com, or visit nikkinanos.com.

Reiki

Reiki Share for Reiki Practitioners and Non-Practitioners with Verapose Yoga & Meditation House • Sunday, January 5, February 2, March 2 & April 6 • 4 to 5:15 p.m. • A Reiki share is a gathering where people can give and receive Reiki treatments in a group setting. No experience or attunement necessary; this is open to all and is a relaxed, casual atmosphere to share and create connection. $20. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.



Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Suzy Wienckowski on Reiki • Thursday, March 13 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Suzy Wienckowski, Reiki Master, will speak on the Usui System of Reiki Healing. It is a gentle, hands-on healing art that promotes balance of the whole person and facilitates healing of the body/mind/spirit. You will have an opportunity to experience Reiki and learn the benefits of a self-practice. FREE. For more information contact Suzy at suzyreiki@aol.com or email events@crazywisddom.net.

Usui System of Reiki Healing, Second Degree with Suzy Wienckowski • Saturday, March 22 from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. & Sunday, March 23 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.• Second level of training in the Usui System of Reiki Healing. Students learn and are empowered to use the three sacred Reiki symbols. The symbols focus and intensify the Reiki energy enabling the practitioner to heal on a deeper level and to send Reiki at a distance. First Degree is a prerequisite. $500. For more information contact Suzy at (734) 476-7958 or email suzyreiki@aol.com.

Usui System of Reiki Healing, First Degree with Suzy Wienckowski • Saturday, April 5 from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. & Sunday, April 6 from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.• Reiki is a gentle, hands-on healing practice that promotes balance and harmony of the Body/Mind/Spirit. Reiki is easily learned by all and after initiation by a Reiki Master healing energy flows effortlessly through your hands. Class includes the history of Reiki, treatment form for yourself and others, and individual initiations. $200. For more information contact Suzy at (734) 476-7958 or email suzyreiki@aol.com.

Retreats

Silent Reflections with Marylin Beker • Friday, January 17 through Sunday, January 18 • Embrace the opportunity to immerse yourself in the energy of the new year. In the peaceful atmosphere of Song of the Morning Ranch, surrounded by the winter stillness, allow yourself, through silent reflection, meditation, hatha yoga practice, guided introspection, and journaling to prepare for a meaningful 2025. $108. For more information contact Song of the Morning at (989) 983-4107, email office@songofthemorning.org, or visit songofthemorning.org.

Beginner's Zen Retreat & Meditation Class with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Friday, January 24 & 25 OR March 21 & 22 • The viewpoint of Zen is that life's every moment is fully lived and contains purpose in itself, not the means for something else. Held in the Temple's meditation hall, the course includes simple stretching exercises, breathwork, meditation postures, concentration, and mindfulness practice. This format is primarily intended for out-of-towners, but local people who cannot attend the Thursday evening course or prefer the overnight retreat, are also welcome. $160. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

It's About Time We Came to Our Senses with Still Mountain Buddhist Meditation Teachers • Saturday, January 25 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Join this silent meditation retreat exploring awareness of the "six sense doors" and the perceptual information coming through them. Every sensation or thought that we experience comes from the five sense doors of touch, scent, taste, smell, and sight. In Buddhism, the mind is considered the sixth sense door. Experiential practices will be offered. FREE, donations welcome. For more information contact Karen at kst734@gmail.com or visit stillmountainmeditation.org.

Inner Peace Retreat with Song of the Morning Community & Staff • Friday through Sunday, the weekends of February 7 through 9, OR Friday, March 21 through 23, OR April 11 through 13 • Relax into the supportive, collective energy of group meditations, devotional practices, and community meals. Our unique meditative style of hatha yoga is suitable for all levels of experience. Walking trails immerse you in the beauty of nature. Come to unwind, recharge, and reconnect with your inner core of peace. $108. For more information contact Song of the Morning at (989) 983-4107, email office@songofthemorning.org, or visit songofthemorning.org.

One Day Meditation Retreat with Ordained Dharma Teachers • Saturday, February 22 & March 8 • 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • This retreat includes sitting and walking meditation, simple manual work, vegetarian meals, and rest. It is an interval of deepening, of slowing down, silence, and mindfulness. Vegetarian lunch is included. $60. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Daylong Meditation Retreat with Carol Blotter • Saturday, March 8 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Meditation practice of sitting and walking with a short talk. Find peace and calm in the quiet woods. Appropriate for all levels of meditators. Suggested Donation of $30-60; pay what you can. For more information contact the Michigan Friends Center at manager@mfcenter.org.

Four-Day Spring Retreat (Yongmaeng Jeongjin) with Haju Sunim • Wednesday, April 2 through Sunday, April 6 • This retreat is a silent, intensive period of Zen practice geared toward the experienced student. $240. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

Holy Week Retreat with Patricia Harvat • Sunday, April 13 to Thursday, April 17 • "There's a time to live and a time to die. In between there's a time to remember." *Violeta* by Isabel Allende. Journey with Mary during these sacred days and experience the passion and death of Jesus through her eyes and heart. Single room is $425; double $325: commuter $180. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Building Resilience through Meditation: Spring Retreat with Khenpo Tshering Chophel • Friday, April 18 through Sunday, April 20 • Peace can only come from within, and this weekend will provide tools for maintaining your equilibrium and skillfully handling confusing emotions when the ocean of life tosses you off balance. This is a secular retreat taught by a Buddhist monk.! Attend part or all of the weekend, stay on- or offsite. $225 includes meals, optional overnight accommodations additional. No one turned away for lack of funds. For more information contact Lama Nancy at (734) 649-2127, email lamanancy@karunabuddhistcenter.org, or visit karunabuddhistcenter.org.

If you are interested in obtaining some biographical information about the teachers, lecturers, and workshop leaders whose classes, talks, and events are listed in this Calendar, please look in the section that follows the Calendar, which is called "Teachers, Lecturers, Workshop Leaders, and The Centers" and which starts on page 104.

The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

Shamanism

Journey Circle with Judy Liu Ramsey • Thursday, January 2, 16, February 6, 20, March 6, 20, April 3 & 17• 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Join other shamanic practitioners to explore life cycles and energies. Pre-requisite: must know how to journey. Instruction is not provided in this circle. $25 per session, $40 per month. For more information contact Judy Liu Ramsey at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Basic Shamanic Journeying with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, February 1 & Sunday, February 2 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Shamanic journeying is an easy and powerful tool used to access spiritual information. The class introduces you to shamanism and easy techniques that will help you move safely and intentionally through the world in a balanced way. This class is prerequisite to more advanced shamanic studies, taught online via ZOOM. $160 per person, $80 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy Liu Ramsey at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Shamanic Animal Communication with Judy Liu Ramsey • Tuesday, February 4, 11, 18, 25, March 4 & 11 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Learn the difference between telepathic and shamanic animal communication; learn how to apply the best of both in an integrated way. Join us for this deeply spiritual exploration of communication. Knowledge of telepathic communication not required. Optional mentoring sessions are offered with this class on Mondays following. Class is online via ZOOM. $300, $150 for repeat students. For more information contact Judy at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Shamanic Personal Safety: Creating Sacred Protected Space with Judy Liu Ramsey • Saturday, March 15 • 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. • Learn techniques for creating sacred space, and why energy hygiene is critical in shamanic work. The class will be taught online via ZOOM. $90. For more information contact Judy Liu Ramsey at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Medicine For the Earth with Judy Liu Ramsey • Wednesday, April 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, May 7 & 14 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Transform the energy behind toxic thoughts for balance in yourself and harmony in your world. Connect with nature, spirit allies, and the elements to transform and heal yourself, the community, and environment. Suggested reading: *Medicine for the Earth* by Sandra Ingerman. All traditions welcome. Journeying skills not required. Class is online via ZOOM. $400, $200 for repeating students. For more information contact Judy Liu Ramsey at info@judyramsey.net or visit JudyRamsey.net.

Spiritual Development

Diamond Gathering: Exploring value with Lou Weir • Saturday, January 4 • 9 to 11:30 a.m. • This teaching is open to the public. There will be a meditation, teaching, and personal exploration of the topic of value; how we seek value outside of ourselves and how we come back to see our intrinsic value. FREE. For more information contact Lou at diamondworkmichigan@gmail.com.

That Which is Already Awake is the Path: Awakening to the Joy and Unconditional Love Within with Barbara Brodsky, Aaron, and John Orr • Tuesday, January 21, February 4,18, March 4,18, April 1, 22, May 6 & 20 • 6:45 to 9:00 p.m. • The class period will be a mixture of meditation instruction and exploring a question together. What is this true self we find when we release identification to the outer forms of body, emotions, and thoughts? Suggested donation: $180-$630. For more information contact the Deep Spring Center at (734) 477-5848, email om@deepspring.org or visit deepspring.org.

Humans: Divine Co-creators in the Cosmos with Barbara Brodsky, Colette Simone & Spirit Friends • Saturday, January 25, March15 & April 26 • 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. • This workshop reminds us that we are part of a multidimensional cosmos in which there are many other beings. We will consider how we can learn to understand and collaborate with others, bringing the gifts of the human to this inter-cosmos collective. Embrace the diversity and complexity of form and learn to co-create. Suggested donation: single workshop-$30-$110; all three workshops $90-$330. For more information contact the Deep Spring Center at Deep Spring Center at (734) 477-5848, email om@deepspring.org, or visit deepspring.org.

God and the Earth: A Conversation with Elizabeth Johnson • Thursday, January 30 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Have you ever reflected on the natural world with the gaze of Jesus? What would it take to expand our sense of community to include all human beings and all creatures as neighbors worthy of our loving care? Elizabeth Johnson draws from her recent book, *Come Have Breakfast* to converse about ecological matters in the light of faith. Live stream only, registration required. $35. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517) 266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

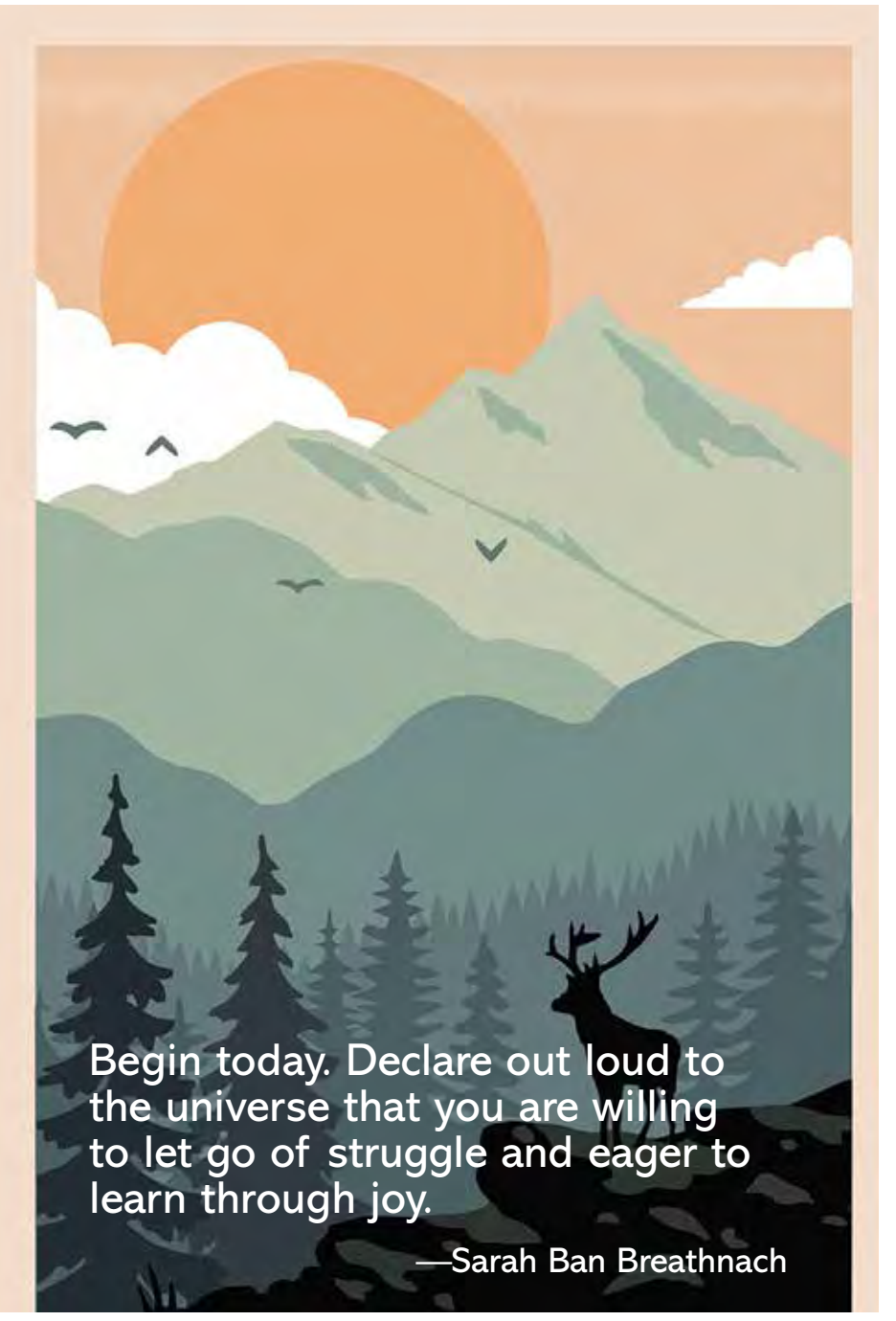
Life's Interruptions: Frustrating Disturbances or Holy Gifts? With Janet Schaeffler • Saturday, February 22 • 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. • What is your life like? Do you ever feel as though it is more about interruptions than about what you have planned to do? Our time together will explore the question: How do we, as disciples of Jesus, as ministerial leaders, live in and with the interruptions of our lives? $45, includes lunch. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Diamond Gathering: Loving the Truth Part One with Lou Weir • Saturday, March 8 • 9 to 11:30 a.m. • This teaching is open to the public. There will be a meditation, teaching, and personal exploration of the topic of loving the truth; how it brings presence to the moment to see what is true for us. FREE. For more information contact Lou at diamondworkmichigan@gmail.com.

A Jesuit's Guide to the Stars with Brother Guy Consolmango • Thursday, March 13 • 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. • Jesuit spirituality is centered on finding God in all things. What better represents "all things" than the universe itself? Indeed, Jesuits have figured prominently in the history of astronomy, engaging both the mind and the heart. Registration required, live stream available. $35. For more information contact the Weber Center at (517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Diamond Gathering: Loving the Truth Part Two with Lou Weir • Saturday, April 5 • 9 to 11:30 a.m. • This teaching is open to the public and accompanies part one. There will be a meditation, teaching, and personal exploration of the topic of loving the truth; how it brings presence to the moment to see what is true for us. FREE. For more information contact Lou at diamondworkmichigan@gmail.com.

Diamond Gathering: Practicing Presence with Lou Weir • Saturday, May 3 • 9 to 11:30 a.m. • This teaching is open to the public. There will be a meditation, teaching, and personal exploration of the meditation and practicing presence, a simple but powerful tool for personal understanding. FREE. For more information contact Lou at diamondworkmichigan@gmail.com.


Begin today. Declare out loud to the universe that you are willing to let go of struggle and eager to learn through joy.
—Sarah Ban Breathnach

Sustainable Living Skills

Winternship 2024 at Strawbale Studio • Sunday, January 5 through Wednesday, February 5 • Unique one month program at Strawbale Studio on rural wooded land one hour north of Detroit. Experience the basics of thatching, reed collection, earth plastering, sculpting, round pole framing, and rocket stove construction. Fireside lectures include site and house design, foundations, code info, fermenting, and whittling! $475-1200. Several worktrade positions available. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088, email ecoartdb@gmail.com, or visit strawbalestudio.org.

Thatching & Reed Collection Two-Day Class with Deanne Bednar •Saturday, January 11 • 9:30 a.m. • Explore this beautiful, ecological, and long-lasting roof system using local Phragmite reed grass. Tour two thatched buildings. Demo and hands-on thatching indoors on a frame. Sunday harvest reed, watch thatching videos. Bednar learned from Danish Thatcher in 1998 during a Strawbale Studio workshop. $55- $120. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088, email ecoartdb@gmail.com, or visit strawbalestudio.org.

Candle-making & Cob Crafts with Deanne Bednar • Saturday, February 15 • 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. • Enjoy a day of creating with wax and earth, dipping candles, sculpting with cob in the sweet surrounding of the Strawbale Studio land. Bring a friend and relax into the process. Held in the main house on 50 wooded acres. Check out the Strawbale Studio while you are here. $60, includes materials. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088, email ecoartdb@gmail.com, or visit strawbalestudio.org

Learning Tour at Strawbale Studio with Deanne Bednar • Sunday, February 23 • 10:00 a.m. to Noon • See the enchanting buildings and grounds, earth oven, living and thatched roofs, sculptural plaster, and strawbale walls. Ask questions! Learn about upcoming tours & classes in sustainable living skills held throughout the year. $20. For more information contact Deanne at (248) 496-4088, email ecoartdb@gmail.com, or visit strawbalestudio.org

Tai Chi, Martial Arts, and Self Defense

Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan with Joe Walters • Ongoing Tuesdays, Thursdays & Saturdays • 4 to 5:00 p.m. • Learn basic training and forms of Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan. FREE. For more information contact Joe at annarbortaichi@gmail.com or visit annarbortaichi.com.

Wu Style Tai Chi Chaun with Marylin Feingold • January 5, 12, 19, 26, February 2, 9, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, April 6, 13, 20 & 27 • 3 to 4:00 p.m. • Learn the ancient art of meditation in motion with this "soft style" martial art emphasizing relaxation and balance. Drop-in, $5 per session collected at the door. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Beginning Tai Chi with Master Wasentha Young • Monday, January 6, 13, 20, 27, February 3, 10, 17, 24, March 3, 10, 17, 24, 31 & April 7 from 10 to 11:15 a.m. AND/OR Thursday, January 9, 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 20, 27, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3 & 10 from 6 to 7:15 p.m. • Tai Chi, often characterized as a moving mindful meditation, is a series of postures linked together in a continuous flow. It integrates the mind and body, promotes relaxation, as well increases balance and concentration. You can attend both sessions at no extra cost! $215. For more information contact the Peaceful Dragon School at (734) 741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

Gentle Qigong with Rory Walsh • Saturday, January 11, 18, 25, February 1, 8, 15, 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29, April 5 & 12 • 10 to 11:15 a.m. • Join us for a harmonizing flow of head-to-toe movement, meditation, and self-acupressure to help you to center and navigate the changing seasons. It is a fun and invigorating self-care practice for all ages and experience levels. $15 Drop-in or $150 for the semester. For more information contact the Peaceful Dragon School at (734) 741-0695, email info@peacefuldragonschool.com, or visit peacefuldragonschool.com.

Tarot and Divination

Mindful Explorations at Crazy Wisdom: Tarot Without Mystery with Leif Laufeyjarsen • Thursday, January 9 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Explore the rich symbolism and meanings of the Tarot, focusing on the Major Arcana and its insights into life's journey. This engaging session offers an introduction to Tarot's history, purpose, and practical uses, with an opportunity for interactive learning. Perfect for beginners and the Tarot-curious! FREE. For more information contact Leif at laufeyjarsen9@gmail.com or email events@crazywisdom.net.

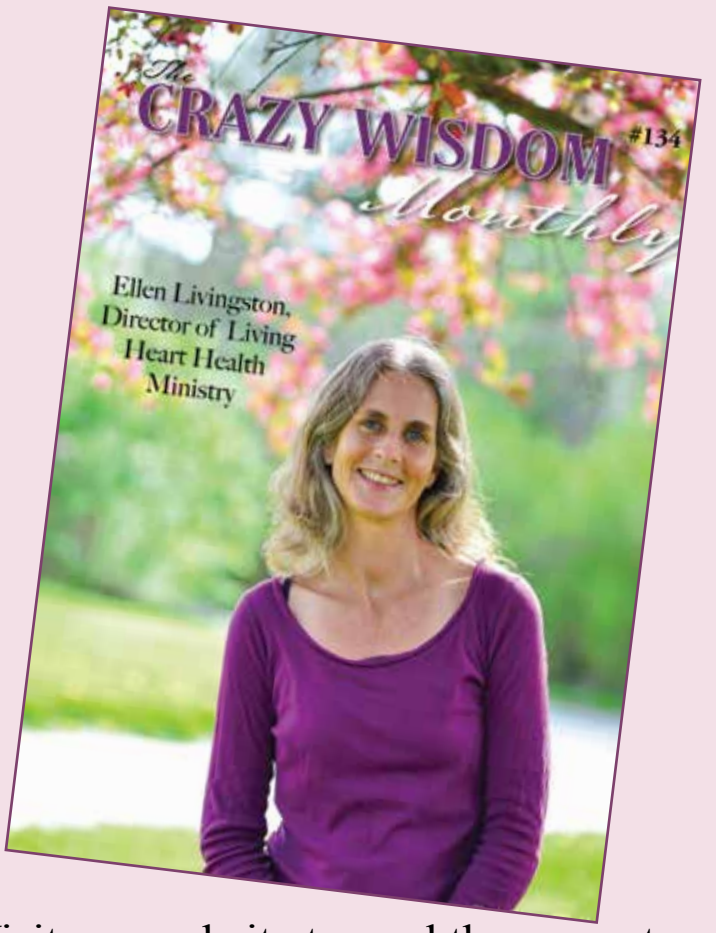
Tea Events

New Year Tea Ceremony and Visioning with Courtney Fitzpatrick • Saturday, January 4 • 2 to 4:00 p.m. • Join Courtney to enjoy the simple, yet profound, ceremonial act of drinking tea together. Through visioning we will deepen our connection to nature, Self, the stillness of the mind, and community for the upcoming year. Supplies included. $45. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at veraposeyoga.com or email veraposeyoga@gmail.com.

Theater

The Elves and the Schumachers Two: Chanukah Boogaloo with Theatre Nova • Friday, December 6 through Sunday, January 5 • Friday 7:30 p.m., Saturday 3:00 p.m. & 7:30pm & Sunday 2:00 p.m. • Join us for another memorable holiday adventure from the team that brought you *The Year Without a Panto Claus and Sugar Plum Panto*! Bring the whole family to laugh, boo, hiss, and sing in this over-the-top evening of heroes and villains, funny songs, and extreme merriment—a mixed-up mash-up of musical comedy slapstick, vaudeville, and fun. Single tickets: $32 for adults, $12 for kids 16 years and under. For more information contact Theatre NOVA at (734) 635-8450, email a2theatrenova@gmail.com, or visit theatrenova.org.

The Crazy Wisdom Monthly represents the voices of our community in a timely and entertaining manner. With **NEW** articles and personal essays, **NEW** event listings, and **NEW** author, artist, and musician interviews, it's the best of Crazy Wisdom in a **bite-sized** read!



Visit our website to read the current and past issues of *The Crazy Wisdom Monthly*!

Artwork by Karen Quinn

Work and Right Livelihood

Finances for Families with Jesse Geary & Maria Princen • Saturday, February 8 • 11:00 a.m. to Noon • For parents planning their financial futures, sometimes a Google search just won't do. Join this community workshop on the tough topics like saving for kids' college, trying to retire, and reaching your mission and dreams. FREE. For more information contact Maria Princen at (734) 646 0069, emailcontact@geddicapital.com or visit geddicapital.com.

Writing and Poetry

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Series with Edward Morin, David Jibson & Lissa Perrin • Writers Workshop: Wednesday, January 8, February 12, March 12 & April 8 • Readings: January 22, April 26, March 26 & April 23 • 7 to 9:00 p.m. • Workshop writers present and discuss their poems and fiction. Featured readers perform; open mic follows. Featured readers: Katherine Edgren, author of *Keeping Out the Noise* (1/22); Ron Koertge, poet, won two PEN Awards (Feb. 26); Leslie Schultz, author of *Geranium Lake* (March 26); Shonda Buchanan, poet & author of memoir *Black Indian* (4/23). FREE. For more information contact Edward at (734) 668-7523, email eacmorso@gmail.com or visit cwcircle.poetry.blog.

Trees Get Along in a Forest: A Hybrid Writing Workshop with Tarianne DeYonker • Saturday, February 22 • 1 to 4:00 p.m. • For eons nature has been teaching about relationships–yes, relationships! In this workshop we'll explore possibilities as we pay attention and open ourselves to learning from her. You're invited to take this time for writing with others, reading what we have written, and learning the strengths that naturally show through our words. $35. For more information contact the Weber Center (at 517)266-4000 or visit webercenter.org.

Yoga

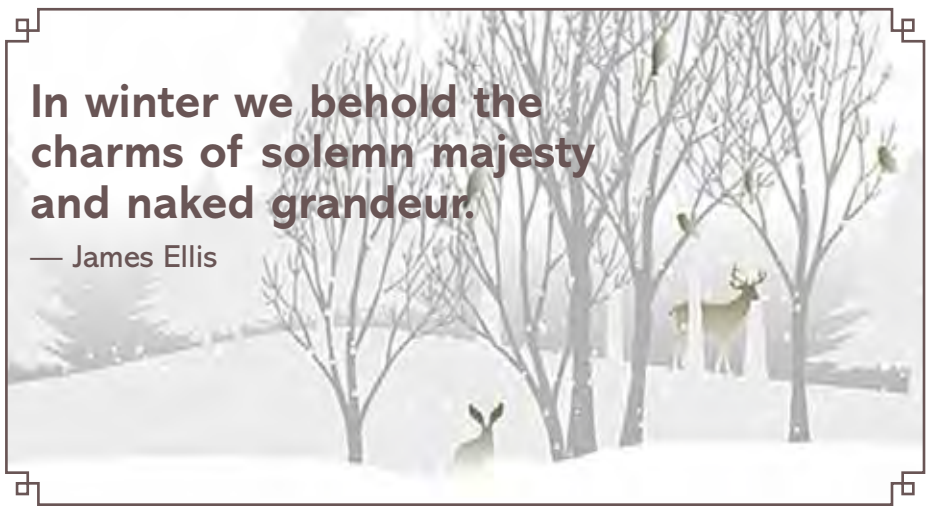
Hatha Yoga with David Black • Ongoing Tuesdays • 6:30 to 8:00 p.m. • Beginning and experienced students in the classes learn traditional yoga postures with an emphasis on relaxation, concentration, and breathwork. $12 per session. For more information contact the Zen Buddhist Temple at (734) 761-6520 or email annarborzentemple@gmail.com.

THE CRAZY WISDOM CALENDAR

Hatha Yoga with Sam Liebermann • Thursday, January 2, 9, 16, 23, 30, February 6, 13, 27, March 6, 13, 20, 27, April 3, 10, 17 & 24 • 9:15 to 10:15 a.m. • On-site only. Sam loves the process of creating and offering safe yet challenging yoga sequencing. She enjoys sharing her love of yoga with all levels of students and is deeply honored to pass the gift of yoga to others. Drop-in $15 per session. First visit is free! Cash or Venmo at door. Bring your own mats. For more information, contact Jewel Heart at (734) 994-3387, email programs@jewelheart.org, or visit jewelheart.org.

Yoga Workshop: Turn Up for Twists with Joe Leary • Saturday, January 11 • 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. • Start the new year with getting into twists! Twists rejuvenate the body when done correctly, leaving you feeling refreshed, calm, and aligned. Take the time to learn how to move into twists and how your hips, spine, and shoulders all play a role in getting to these poses. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Toddler Yoga with Courtney Fitzpatrick • Saturday, January 4, February 1, March 1 & May 5 • 8 to 8:45 a.m. • We'll be playing games, trying out some yoga poses, read a yoga-related book and have some fun! This is a wonderfully relaxed time to explore movement and to have some quality time together. $25 per class. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.



Monthly Moon Flow & Gathering with Courtney Fitzpatrick • Friday, January 10, February 8, March 14 & April 12 • 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. • Join us for this special offering to celebrate the full moon, which blends gentle yoga and movement, storytelling, as well as ample time for sharing/connecting and contemplation. $40. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Valentine's Day Partner Yoga with Courtney Fitzpatrick • Friday, February 14 • 7 to 8:30 p.m. • Give your loved one a gift of your undivided attention, support and love while we move together in this fun partner yoga playshop! Of course, our Valentine's practice wouldn't be complete without enjoying some delectable sparkling cider and chocolate! $50. For more information contact Verapose Yoga & Meditation House at (734) 808-4007, email veraposeyoga@gmail.com, or visit veraposeyoga.com.

Sound Bath and Yoga Experience with Katie Schroeder • Sunday, January 12 AND/OR Saturday, February 22 • 4 to 5:00 p.m. • Sound Bath begins with accessible yoga poses. Then you'll settle in and enjoy the calming sounds and vibrations of the singing bowls, tuning forks, and a rain disk. Our instructor uses the sound and her voice to help you wind down from the week, get cleared and energized for the week ahead. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Yoga Workshop: Balance is Not Just in the Legs with Joseph Leary • Saturday, April 12 • 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. • We all want balance, and as we move into spring, we can take lessons from yoga into life. This workshop is about finding balance in both standing and non-standing poses, in our bodies and minds. Some inversions may be taught with support, such as headstand if it is more comfortable. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

Yoga Workshop: Mudras (Hand Poses) with Joseph Leary • Saturday, May 17 • 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. • Mudras are hand poses, each utilized for a unique intention. They can be used during yoga asanas, or more commonly, during meditation practice. This helps to set the intention of your practice as well as create energy connections through the hands and arms. $30. For more information contact The Mix Studios at (734) 845-9105 or visit the-mix-studios.com.

for little ones with BIG imaginations...

welcome to

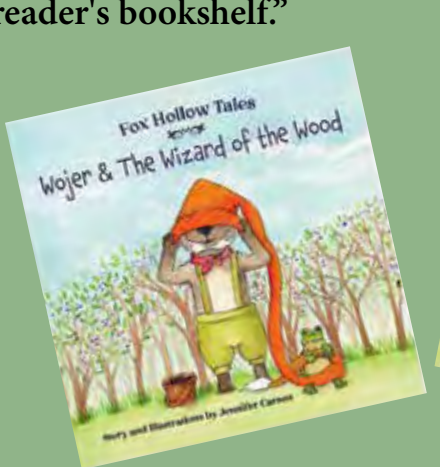
Fox Hollow

"This is such a captivating children's book. My kiddos absolutely love it! It is beautifully written with engaging vocabulary and stunning illustrations."

"The vocabulary in this book is impressive. Advanced words are seamlessly integrated into the narrative, enhancing the reading experience for young readers without being too complicated."

"Each page is filled with beautiful colors and details that bring the characters and their world to life. My children were captivated by the artwork and often paused to examine it closely."

"This book is definitely a must-have for any young reader's bookshelf."



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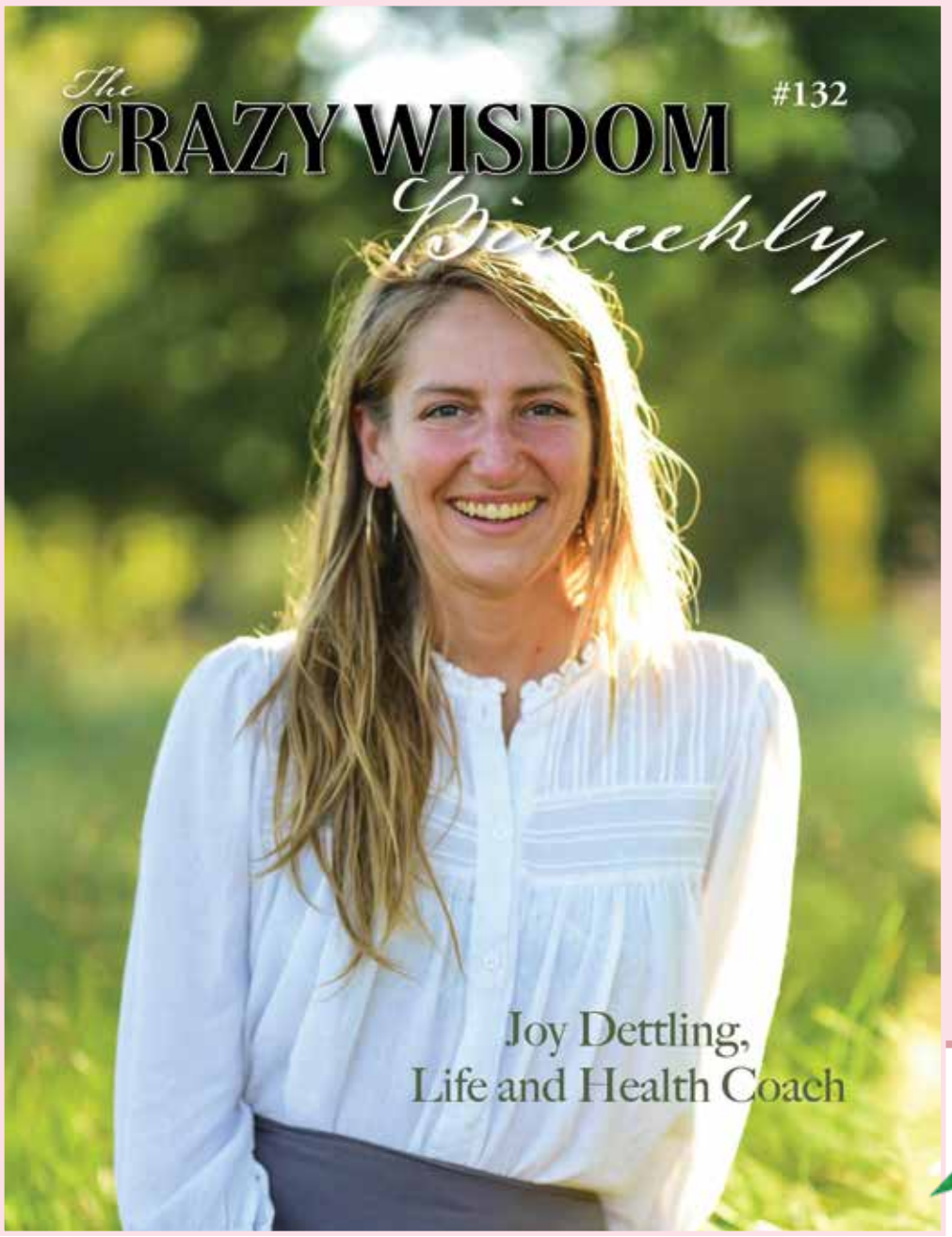


As the founder of Ignite Life, Joy Dettling has a quiet confidence and an unassuming authority as the host of weekly movement gatherings, frequent workshops, and her treatment modality. Read our profile of Dettling, in issue #132 of *The CW Biweekly* (now *The CW Monthly*).

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Aaron is a discarnate spirit and teacher from a realm beyond the Earth plane. He has lived many lifetimes, expressing great love, compassion, wisdom, and humor.

Joy Aleccia has a MS in Public Health, CYT, and is a Certified Health Education Specialist. She has been working with families and youth for seven years.

George Balarezo is an author, podcast host, and professor living in Seoul, South Korea, and Ann Arbor, Michigan. He has cycled over 20,000 kilometers around the world.

Paola Bardell, LMT graduated from AASM and is scholar of Thai Bodywork and Lymphatic Massage. She has a private practice in the Ann Arbor metro area.

Deanne Bednar has an MA Social Ecology and trained with Cob Cottage Co. Since 2003, she is the Coordinator/ Instructor at Strawbale Studio.

Marilyn Beker, long time Kriyaban of Self-Realization Fellowship, is a film maker, writer, and professor at the Loyola Marymount University School of Film and Television.

David Black was trained by the Sivananda Yoga Organization and meditation training experience.

> The measure of intelligence is the ability to change.
>
> —*Albert Einstein*

Carol Blotter has been teaching meditation for over 25 years and leads the Chelsea Meditation Group. Her practice and study blends Buddhism and Non-Duality teachings.

Barbara Brodsky, founder and guiding teacher of Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry, teaches Vipassana meditation and non-dual awareness from the Dzogchen traditions.

Suzanne Willets Brooks earned her BS in dance and education. She is a CMT certified in Pilates, GYROTONIC®, GYROKINESIS®, and a is a level four Franklin Method® therapist.

Catherine Carr author, priestess, transformation coach, studied neuroscience and political science at U of M; After, she studied at The Village Mystery School and Dream Temple.

Dr. Kapila Castoldi is a physics professor. She has studied meditation under the guidance of spiritual teacher Sri Chinmoy for nearly 40 years.

Dr. Monalise Chinn has a background in mental health with 25+ years' experience and is passionate in helping others liberate their self-expression and live more authentically.

Jean Chorazyczewski has been leading community music events with Lori Fithian since

Winter is not a season,
it's a celebration.

–Anamika Mishra

Where Do We Distribute The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal?

6,500 copies of *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal* are distributed to more than 235 locations in the Ann Arbor area, including Crazy Wisdom Bookstore, Castle Remedies at the Parkway Center, Kerrytown, Schuler Books, the Zen Temple, Sweetwaters, Michigan Union, the Better Health Store, North Campus Commons, U-M, EMU, WCC, Arbor Farms, the Center for Sacred Living, Complete Chiropractic, the Lighthouse Center, Jewel Heart, Tsogyelgar, York, Argus Farm Stop, Michigan Theater, Seva, Booksweet, Clark Pharmacy, and the Weber Center.

We also distribute to the offices of dozens of doctors, holistic health care providers and therapists.

If you'd like us to bring copies of The CW Community Journal to your office, studio or center, please email: bill@crazywisdom.net.

2002. Their philosophy: no rehearsals, no reading music, no pressure, no experienced required.

Brother Guy Consolmagno SJ, also known as "the Pope's Astronomer," is the Director of the Vatican Observatory.

Maum Gloria Cox is an ordained Buddhist priest with 20 years of experience.

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle is a writers group based at Crazy Wisdom.

Deep Spring Center for Meditation and Spiritual Inquiry is a non-profit 501(c)3 guided by wisdom teachings from multiple traditions. Our loving community commits to spiritual practices of wisdom, compassion, and an open heart.

Durga Devi has been a yoga teacher for 21 years and a wellness coach for 15, has a holistic approach to health and healing.

Tarianne DeYonker, OP, MSW, is a Certified Amherst Writers and Artists Facilitator.

The Diamond Approach is a method of spiritual growth and unfoldment; it utilizes inquiry, a moment-to-moment exploration into what's true in our immediate experience.

The Dying Year leads education in dvance Care Planning, Home Funeral, and Green Burial as well as hosts the Death Café.

Elaine Economou is the CEO and Co-Founder of MOVE Wellness.

The Enlightened Soul Center & Shop aims to spread the light to Southeast Michigan and beyond.

Mara Evenstar Ceremonialist, Educator, Mentor, Healer, Guide, MTP, and M.Ed., is a certified teacher of Realization Process and an Usui / Karuna / Holy Fire Reiki Master Teacher.

Marylin Feingold began training in Tai Chi Chuan as a way to help control pain and maintain mobility after being diagnosed with health problems.

Lori Fithian has been leading drumming events since 1998 and welcomes any and all to join in the fun of Drummunity: people getting together to jam in all kinds of rhythmic ways.

Courtney Fitzpatrick, MA, E-RYT-500, YACEP, and Reiki Master is the founder of Verapose Yoga.

John Friedlander is an internationally acclaimed psychic, author, and teacher with degrees from Duke University and Harvard Law School.

Jesse Geary and Maria Princen founded Geddi Capital, a registered investment adviser firm, to put their finance and investing experience to use for everyday people.

Curtis Glatter is a percussionist/ improviser/ composer since the age of 15. He has performed on dozens of live and studio recordings all over America.

Robin Lily Goldberg, MFA, RYT, is an Ecological Artist, Organic Intelligence® Coach, and Healing-Centered Educator.

Peter D. Harper and Bobbi Llewellyn- Harper are award winning Australian musicians and sound healers. They have presented their workshops worldwide in the USA, Canada, Australia, Europe, and China.

Lynnea Harris is the owner of Pulse Nutrition.

Patricia Harvat, OP, is a member of the Adrian Dominican sisters. She earned a master's degree in theological studies from CTU in Chicago.

Craig Harvey has been facilitating the Peace Generator event since 2001.

Gloria Hemsher is a psychic, author, teacher, and author of the book *Psychic Psychology*.

The Huron River Mindfulness Community is a peer-led group that practices meditation, discussing the Buddha's teachings as conveyed through the written and recorded words of Thich Nhat Hanh.

Elizabeth Hurwitz has practiced meditation 1970s. She began studying Buddhism in 2006, completing residential teacher trainings in yoga, Buddhist philosophy, and meditation.

Jewel Heart Instructors lead participants in meditation and are available to answer participants' questions.

Denise Held, RN and foot reflexologist, has been at the Natural Healing Center in Ann Arbor since 2007. Previously, she was a nurse at U of M for 20 years.

Katy Held is a licensed Brain Gym® and Bal-A-Vis-X instructor. She took her first Brain Gym course in 2001 to help her son, who has a disability.

David Jibson is a poet, editor, blogmaster, and former social worker.

Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, is a widely translated author, editor, mentor, and professor emerita of theology at Fordham University in New York.

Penni Jones is the owner of HIIT Happy.

Karuna Buddhist Center is an independent nonprofit with a strong background in Tibetan Buddhism and a nonsectarian emphasis.

Esther Kennedy, OP, is a Dominican Sister of Adrian, Michigan, retreat leader, and spiritual director. She conducts a monthly Day of Mindfulness at Weber Center.

A Fourth-Generation Herbalist's Journey

By Yuliya Koval

For generations, our ancestors have preserved seeds, leaves, flowers, and roots using natural methods for self-healing. To honor their legacy, connect with my elders, and pass on this knowledge, I made it my mission to practice herbalism and educate anyone willing to learn about the amazing world of plant medicine. I learn something new every day when I am in nature. I take time to listen, pay attention, and trust the universe.

Since a very young age, I have been sensitive to scents and smells. I enjoyed the natural flower fragrances in the summertime when I was roaming around the forests and valleys of Ukraine with my grandmothers and aunts, from whom I learned how to mix various herbs when making tea.

For generations, our ancestors have preserved seeds, leaves, flowers, and roots using natural methods for self-healing.

With time, as a teenager, I pursued studying yoga and the Tibetan art of meditation and mindfulness, which would come in very handy later in life as I studied foreign languages and eventually arrived in the United States, where my family immigrated.

Essential oils came into my life naturally during, and especially post-partum, after the birth of my first child. I felt drawn to working with the essential oils to help my mood and emotions. I decided to further my knowledge in applying essential oils in daily life, and I have been on this journey for 20 years. A holistic approach to health, and finding natural methods of disease prevention, is my goal. I enjoy researching how plants can help humanity. I am fascinated by how many benefits exist in the power of the bark, roots, leaves, flowers, and buds. Every day I learn something new about this abundant world.

Along with these studies that directly influence my olfactory system, I have learned that the oils also use application mechanisms to work on the cellular level: through the skin and gastrointestinal system for example. Not only do oils influence the emotional state, but they also vibrate on an energetic level.

I enjoy researching how plants can help humanity. I am fascinated by how many benefits exist in the power of the bark, roots, leaves, flowers, and buds. Every day I learn something new about this abundant world.

In 2018, I began my studies of Reiki at the Beaumont Hospital in the Department of Integrative Medicine. I have learned how Reiki is applied in the clinical cases of patients as well as for the caretakers. I have been working with people who have recently come out of surgical procedures as well as the therapists who work with patients daily. The more I see this incredible source of Universal Light in action, how it soothes one's nervous system with its healing effect, and how it brings calm to a patient, I am humbled and amazed. I have been practicing applying essential oils for children and teenagers to soothe their busy and anxious nature. I truly believe that in these days of informational overload we are in strong need of such an incredible source of calm. This motivates me to continue practicing Reiki with a focus on the energetic meridians of the human body via olfactory nerve stimulation through the senses, reflexology pressure points to activate one's energetic meridians, and Reiki to achieve full homeostasis, recalibration, and freshness.

As a fourth-generation herbalist, I have a deep understanding of natural remedies. The wisdom passed down from my elders has been a part of me since my childhood in Ukraine. Spending time harvesting herbs in my backyard is a mindful and meditative activity for me. I enjoy picking fresh violets, crushing the leaves, and using them for poultices, soups, and teas. I believe that plants serve a purpose, so I make it a point to communicate with them and listen to what they have to say.

As a fourth-generation herbalist, I have a deep understanding of natural remedies. The wisdom passed down from my elders has been a part of me since my childhood in Ukraine.

I strongly believe in the connection between emotional and physical health. I've dedicated time to researching and studying plants by delving into various materials to understand their healing properties. This has inspired me to follow in the footsteps of my herbalist teachers and create herbal remedies. I meticulously forage plants in White Lake, Michigan, and also source exotic plants such as Umckaloabo root from trusted suppliers around the world to ensure the highest quality for my offerings.

I am very thankful and excited that I can sustainably process these plants and preserve their properties for when they are needed. My methods of preservation and processing include drying the herbs and creating cold infusions, decoctions, tinctures, glycerites, syrups, herbal honey, skin creams, poultices, and bath mixtures. Consistent use of the essential oils helps to improve quality of life for people with long-term health problems like dementia, ease certain types of pain, serve as a strong antibacterial and analgesic, ease some of the side effects of cancer treatment, like nausea and pain to name a few.

I have been studying various modalities of holistic care throughout the years and have proven results of the care that works. Between Aromatherapy, Energy Work, Massage, Acupressure, and Herbal Medicine, I have seen many great benefits of deep relaxation and mindfulness. I work with each patient to help them reach a state of self-care and self-kindness as I consider those to be the major drivers for the wholesome-happy being.

Yuliya Koval is a Corewell Health Certified Integrative Medicine Practitioner and Reiki Master living in White Lake. She sells her naturally made products online at yuliyasnaturals.com. You can also schedule a healing session and browse her workshops online or email her at healingwithyuliya@gmail.com.

TEACHERS, LECTURERS, WORKSHOP LEADERS & THE CENTERS

Rev. Annie Kopko strives to help people to become more comfortable about the topic of death.

Yulia Koval is an advocate for integrative wellness, empowering individuals to forge a connection between mind, body, and spirit.

Sarah Kreiner has been teaching strength training for 15 years. She is a ACSM certified personal trainer and lover of all things movement

Laney Lane has taught dance and group fitness for over eight years. She is high energy and hopes to bounce and answer all your questions soon.

Leif Laufeyjarsen has over three decades of experience and connection to Tarot's rich symbolism, bringing a compassionate and empathetic approach to his readings and teaching.

Joseph Leary is a personal trainer and group fitness instructor with a love of running and Yoga.

Samantha Lieberman has been practicing yoga since 1988. She received teacher trainings in Yoga Fit and Yoga Medics, a model approach emphasizing alignment and therapeutic needs.

Mary Light, ND, MH, LMT, founded NSAA and Gaia Center for Herbal Studies, a community learning center. She trained extensively from 1991 through 1999, and beyond.

Judy Liu Ramsey is a shamanic practitioner, animal chaplain and communicator with over 20 years of experience.

John Madison has been teaching meditation for over 25 years. He is the Principal Violist of the Michigan Opera Theatre Orchestra.

The Magical Education Council works to bring people together from mystical and esoteric paths.

The Michigan Friends Center is a non-profit promoting social, environmental, and spiritual awareness.

Jackie Miller is a Certified Professional Breathwork Practitioner; trained with Transformative Education International and is certified by the Global Professional Breathwork Alliance.

The Mix Studios offers fitness classes, personal and small group training, and massage.

Edward Morin is a writer, editor, and former university teacher.

The Mother is one who gives birth to, supports, and cherishes, and then releases out into the universe, with love, always ready to hold and support.

MOVE Wellness is a Pilates and GYROTONIC® studio located just outside of downtown Ann Arbor**.**

Glenn Mullin studied philosophy, literature, meditation, yoga, and the enlightenment culture under 35 of the greatest living masters of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dr. Katherine Munter, LCP and RAT, is the founder of Creative Life Therapy and has over 20 years of experience working in academic and professional settings.

Nikki Nanos is mindful meditation teacher and coach trained and certified by the School of Positive Transformation, The Mindful Coach Method, and Mindful Attentionist program.

John Orr, retired faculty of Duke University, received Theravada Buddhist training for eight years as a monk. He is the guiding teacher of New Hope Sangha.

Lissa Perrin is a poet and former clinical social worker.

Maureen Pizzuti is a painter and illustrator, influenced by and certified to teach the "Art of Allowing" with Flora Aube.

Recentered Pilates is a local studio specializing in Pilates, GYROTONIC®, and Franklin Method®.

Demo Rinpoche is Jewel Heart's Resident Spiritual Advisor. He studied under the supervision of the Dalai Lama and holds the highest monastic degree of Geshe Lharampa.

Gelek Rimpoche was the Founder and Spiritual Director of Jewel Heart. Rimpoche's command of western culture allowed him to convey the Tibetan Buddhist tradition with wisdom and kindness.

Cat Robinette is a Celtic Water Priestess, Pagan, and Witch, and author of *Heal the Water*. She's a Registered Metaphysician, blending spirituality with activism to combat pollution.

Merilynne Rush, MSHP, BSN, former birth midwife and hospice nurse, provides comprehensive natural death care consulting and EOL doula education.

Hartmut Sagolla has been studying Tibetan Buddhism for over 30 years. Since 2002, he has served as a Program Director at Jewel Heart.

Janet Schaeffler, OP, former director of adult faith formation for the archdiocese of Detroit, leads days of reflection/retreats, parish missions, workshops and facilitates on-line courses.

Naren K. Schreiner is a long-time disciple of Paramahansa Yogananda, who resided in the SRF Ashram for 14 years, he continued his vocation as an ordained Hindu priest.

Susan Slack has been leading the Dances of Universal Peace for over four decades in local circles in Buffalo, NY, her hometown, Sarasota, FL, and international camps.

Song of the Morning Ranch est. 1970, welcomes spiritual seekers to enjoy spiritual renewal.

Colette Simone has served as a psychologist, educator, and musician. She serves as channel for Yeshua, Mary Magdalene, Anna, grandmother of Yeshua, and I AM that I AM.

Patti Stephen, LMT, graduated from AASM, and is transitioning from a 23 year-career as a Dental Hygienist; She acts as a mentor for developing hands-on massage styles.

Haju Sunim is the venerable founder of the Ann Arbor Zen Temple. She has 40 years of experience as a Zen practitioner and teacher.

Theatre NOVA is celebrating 10 years promoting the value and excitement of new plays and new playwrights in the Ann Arbor community.

Khenpo Tschering Chophel is an experienced Buddhist teacher based in Ann Arbor with a Ph.D in Buddhist Studies following traditional monk's training in India.

Rory Walsh has eight years of experience and is a certified Qigong instructor trained by Master Wasentha Young of the Peaceful Dragon School.

Joe Walters is a 30-year practitioner of Chen Style Tai Chi Chuan.

Wasentha Young, MS in Transpersonal Studies, has practiced Tai Chi and Qigong since 1968. She trained in Buddhist and Taoist meditation, Acupressure, and Five Element Practice.

Wendy Weiner has practiced Buddhism for 15 years and serves as the Jewel Heart-Ann Arbor Sangha President and on the Jewel Heart Board.

Lou Weir is a founding teacher of Insight Meditation Ann Arbor and a certified Diamond Approach teacher.

Suzy Wienckowski, Reiki Master and member of the Reiki Alliance has studied with several masters and been teaching Reiki for 30 years.

Rev. Eve Wilson, Master Healer, World Healing and Ascension Worker is an award-winning Blogger and Author of Riding the Wave of Change.

Yulia's Naturals specializes in essential oils, energetic healing, Reiki, meditation, and holistic wellness.

Zen Temple Ordained Dharma Teachers are ordained in the Maitreya Buddhist Seminary.

Imaginary Friend Revivals:

A Return to Playfulness

By Debra Metler MSW, CHC

Sitting alone in the dark in the back row of a movie theater, I sobbed relentlessly. I had just watched the movie *IF*. IF stands for Imaginary Friend. The movie was about adults reuniting with imaginary friends from their childhood at critical times in their life. The adults were transformed by acknowledging their previously discarded imaginary friends and became so much happier, creative, and productive. This movie touched me deeply. Perhaps my fearful inner child had come out of hiding for a moment looking for help. Or maybe I secretly hoped an old friend from my past would come back to rescue me. Following that experience, I became interested in learning more about imaginary friends and their relationships with adults.

Do you remember your childhood imaginary friend? Studies show that adults need imaginary friends to add playfulness and creativity to their lives as much as children do.

Imaginary friends are an important and generally accepted part of many children's lives. They provide comfort in times of stress, companionship during lonely times, and can often be dependable friends in a difficult world. Adults are generally comfortable with the idea of imaginary friends for their children. Do you remember your childhood imaginary friend?

Did you know that, according to the internet, some adults also have imaginary friends? Maybe even more adults have secretly retained their imaginary friends but don't like to talk about them in public. Imaginary friends are a good thing. Studies show that adults need imaginary friends to add playfulness and creativity to their lives as much as children do. Imaginary friends can provide a sense of companionship for adults who might be feeling lonely and isolated. Adults can find that having an imaginary friend improves their sense of humor and stimulates their imagination. Imaginary friends can help adults cope with stress. They can be helpful for rehearsing difficult conversations and confronting fears. Talking to an imaginary friend can help with self-reflection and decision making. Imaginary friends can even help with creating deeper connections in real relationships.

On another level, imaginary friends can help adults heal their inner child. The inner child represents our true, authentic self before the influences of societal expectations, conditioning, and the pressures of adulthood set in. An imaginary friend embodies our natural curiosity, creativity, spontaneity, and emotional vulnerability. We must embrace our vulnerabilities, heal old wounds, and integrate the wisdom and authenticity of our inner child into our adult lives. Having an imaginary friend as an adult can help us heal our inner child by providing an avenue for self-expression, emotional release, and exploration.

Adult play can boost your creativity, sharpen your sense of humor, and help you cope better with stress. Anything you do recreationally that brings you joy, or excitement, counts as playing...

Play is just as important for adults as it is for children. Adult play can boost your creativity, sharpen your sense of humor, and help you cope better with stress. Anything you do recreationally that brings you joy, or excitement, counts as playing, whether it's talking to imaginary friends, playing sports or games, doing hobbies, dancing, or anything else you enjoy.

When adults learn to channel their childlike playfulness into their daily lives, magical things can happen. Their creativity resurfaces, their imagination is unleashed, and life becomes more colorful.

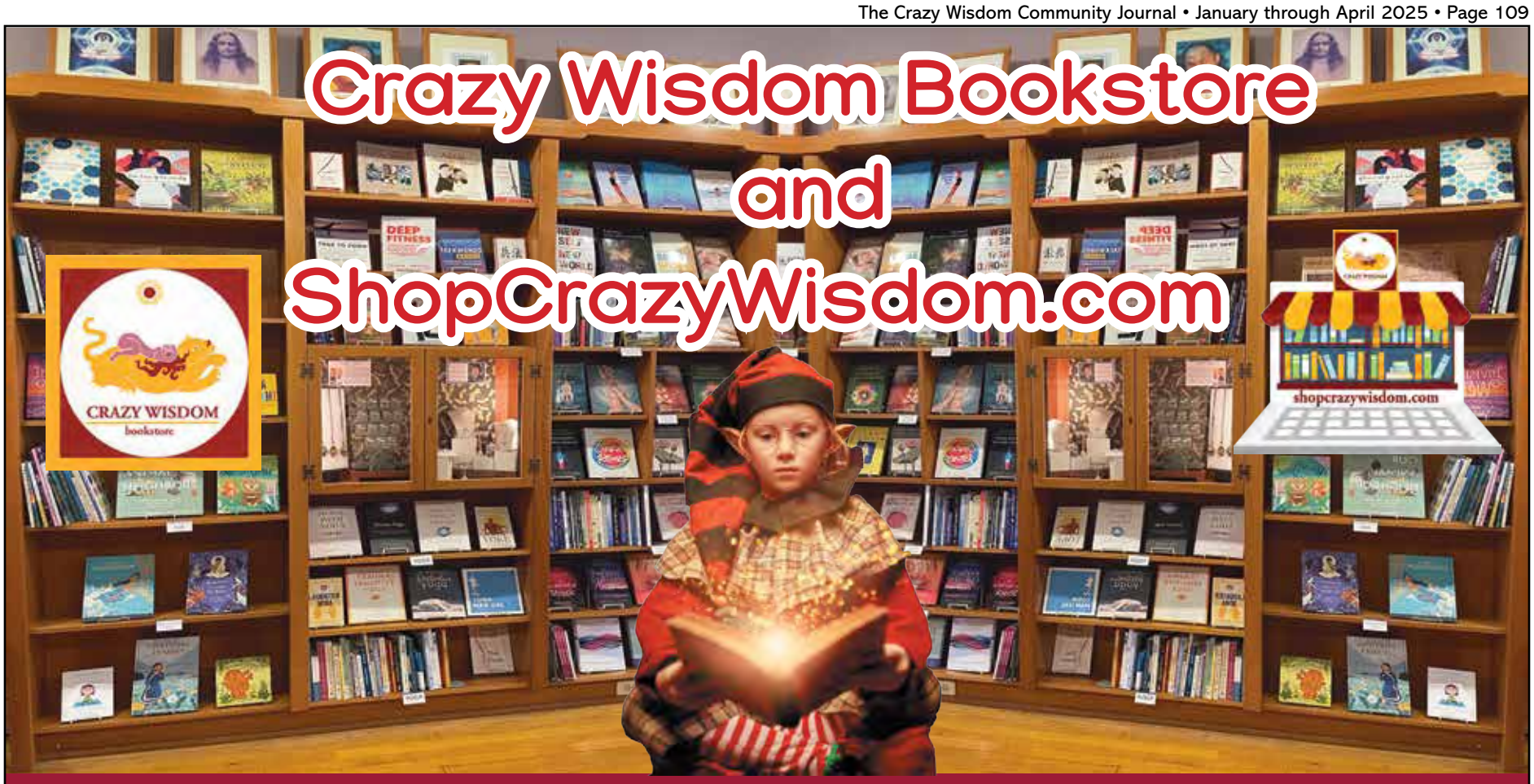
Imaginary friends are more prevalent than people would expect. Many famous people, including writers, artists, and other creatives, have had imaginary friends or spoken about creating imaginary worlds. Alan Moore, a comic book writer, speaks with imaginary friends and characters to improve his writing. Edgar Allan Poe's imaginary friend "Jupiter" was a great source of comfort and inspiration in his troubled life. Emily Bronte and her siblings created elaborate imaginary worlds with fictional countries, characters, and stories. These imaginative exercises shaped their writing styles. Stan Lee's imaginary friends and vivid imagination built the fantastic worlds that eventually became the Marvel Universe. Christopher Robin Milne had imaginary friends in the stuffed animals of Winnie the Pooh and Tigger which became the basis for some very famous characters.

Following all of my research about imaginary friends and play for adults, I learned to create group, and individual, Imaginary Friend Revivals to help people reconnect with the playfulness of their inner child. I established Guffaw University to give structure to my plan and add to the fun. Guffaw University's primary purpose, in addition to reuniting adults with imaginary friends, is to focus on bringing playfulness back into the lives of adults. When adults learn to channel their childlike playfulness into their daily lives, magical things can happen. Their creativity resurfaces, their imagination is unleashed, and life becomes more colorful. Reconnecting with past imaginary friends and/or creating new imaginary friends as an adult are important steps in the process of unleashing the imagination and healing the inner child.

I've become especially playful since I've become a senior. I've found that people really don't notice me anymore and I can get into some (innocent) trouble when needed.

I've become especially playful since I've become a senior. I've found that people really don't notice me anymore and I can get into some (innocent) trouble when needed. Following an overly-serious mini career as a Social Worker, I took on many entrepreneurial endeavors leading to my present day situation as a Certified Health Coach which qualifies me to glare at people while they eat unhealthy foods. I love being a member of the legendary, Moist Lips and Chapped, musical comedy band with my son, David. I'm trying not to get old too fast, and my imaginary friend and I enjoy watching turkey and deer families walk through my yard.

Debra Metler is a Clinical Social Worker and Certified Health Coach living in West Bloomfield. She's married with three grown, hilarious children and one incredible cat. Find an Imaginary Friend Revival at guffaw.square.site.



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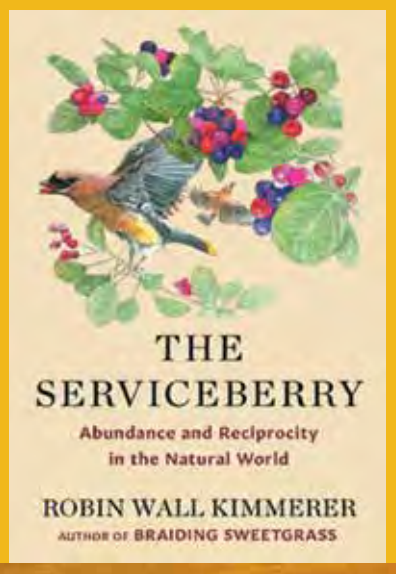

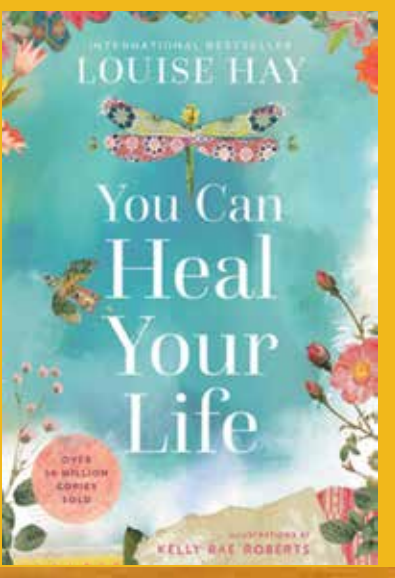

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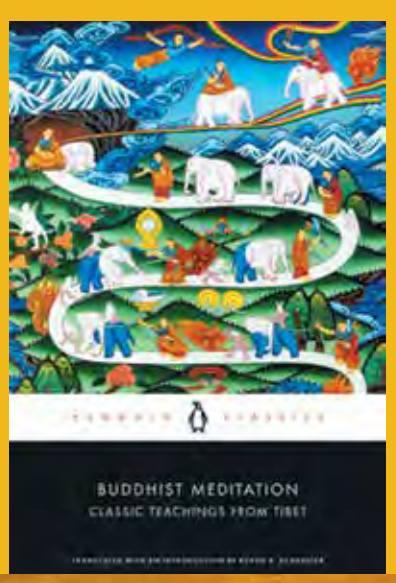

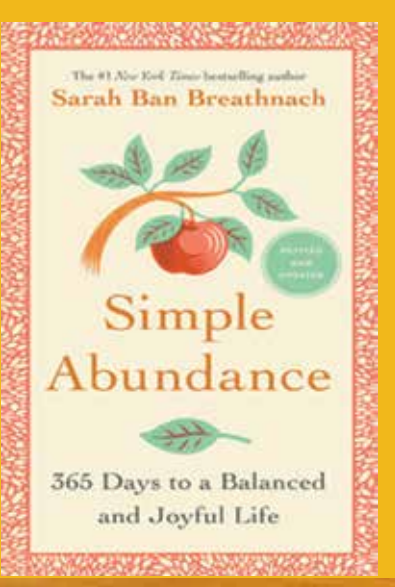

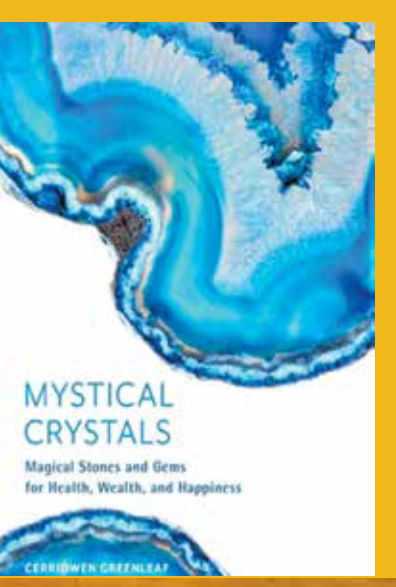

Green Living

The Sustainability Imperative: A Call to Slow Down and the Cost of Convenience in Shopping Small

By Jessica Cichowlas

In a world that often feels like it's spiraling out of control—where climate crises loom, cities buzz relentlessly, and our pace of life rarely allows for a breath—it's easy to feel overwhelmed. Amid this chaos, movements like sustainability, slow living, and shopping small have emerged as radical yet simple antidotes. What ties these practices together is the pursuit of a more intentional, connected, and grounded life. Each contributes not only to personal well-being but also to the health of our communities and planet. This interconnected wisdom offers us a pathway to stay sane in an increasingly unstable world.

Amid this chaos, movements like sustainability, slow living, and shopping small have emerged as radical yet simple antidotes.

Sustainability is about living within the means of what Earth can provide while ensuring that future generations can meet their needs as well. Yet, sustainability goes beyond just environmental concerns; it also encompasses social and economic dimensions. Sustainable practices often ask us to slow down. Whether it's eating seasonally, choosing products with minimal environmental impact, or adopting a lifestyle that emphasizes reuse and repair over constant replacement. Sustainability challenges the breakneck speed of modern consumer culture. Fast fashion, for example, thrives on constant newness, cheap materials, and exploitative labor. In contrast, sustainability and shopping locally encourages us to invest in fewer, better-made items, to understand the story behind the things we purchase, and to appreciate the value in longevity and quality.

Jessica Cichowlas—BYOC has locations in Ann Arbor and Plymouth.

Slowing down in this way does more than just benefit the environment: it offers a reprieve for our overwhelmed minds and souls. In choosing a sustainable path, we also create space for mindfulness, reducing the stress that comes from participating in an economy designed to make us feel like we're always behind, always in need of something new. This leads us directly into the concept of slow living. At the heart of the slow-living movement is a radical proposition: life doesn't need to move at the frenetic pace society dictates. For many, slow living starts with small, intentional choices. It might be taking the time to cook a meal from scratch using fresh, local ingredients rather than relying on processed convenience foods. It could be choosing to walk or bike rather than drive, not only as an act of environmental stewardship but also as a way to connect with the world around us whether that's noticing the changing leaves on a tree or greeting a neighbor on the street. It could mean collecting your bottles and containers and making the trip to your local refillery to purchase cleaning products and personal care items.

Slow living is about mindfulness, deliberation, and connecting deeply to the present moment. It invites us to live in ways that prioritize quality over quantity, being over doing, and depth over breadth. The simplicity of slow living isn't about abstaining from modern life but rather engaging with it on our terms stripping away the excess to find what truly matters. This practice inherently reduces our environmental footprint aligning slow living with sustainability. When we choose to live more slowly, we often buy less, waste less, and tread more lightly on the planet. Moreover, slow living creates a space for reflection and mental clarity helping us cultivate resilience in a world that often feels too fast, too loud, and too much.

One of the most tangible ways slow living and sustainability come together is through the choice to shop local ... sustainability and shopping locally encourages us to invest in fewer, better-made items, to understand the story behind the things we purchase, and to appreciate the value in longevity and quality.

One of the most tangible ways slow living and sustainability come together is through the choice to shop local. At first glance, shopping locally might seem like a small act, but its ripple effects are profound. When we choose to support local businesses—whether that's a neighborhood coffee shop, a family-owned farm, or a nearby artisan—we invest in the health of our communities.

In a world that constantly pushes us toward more—more consumption, more speed, more success—these movements offer a way to step off the hamster wheel and reconnect with what truly matters.

The benefits of shopping locally extend beyond environmental impact. It strengthens community bonds, fosters social connection, and builds local resilience. The local butcher, baker, or maker becomes not just a merchant but a person with whom we share a relationship. The act of buying local cultivates a sense of belonging, a groundedness, that can be hard to find in a globalized world dominated by impersonal, online mega-retailers. When we shop local, we also contribute to the local economy. Studies show that local businesses are more likely to reinvest their earnings back into the community, supporting schools, public services, and local jobs. By choosing to support these enterprises, we become part of a virtuous cycle that fosters sustainable economic practices and vibrant, thriving neighborhoods.

It's a quiet, thoughtful revolution, one that whispers to us in moments of stillness, asking us to consider: What kind of world do we want to create? And how can we live in a way that sustains not only our environment but also our souls?

So, how do sustainability, slow living, and shopping local tie into our sanity? In a world that constantly pushes us toward more—more consumption, more speed, more success—these movements offer a way to step off the hamster wheel and reconnect with what truly matters. They provide a framework for living that aligns with our natural rhythms, our need for connection, and our longing for meaning. The mental health benefits of these practices are undeniable. Sustainability encourages us to step back and evaluate our impact on the world, fostering a sense of purpose that counters feelings of helplessness or apathy. Slow living reminds us that we don't need to keep up with the relentless pace of modern life. Shopping local, meanwhile, reinforces our connection to community, which is vital for mental well-being. The isolation that often accompanies modern urban life can be mitigated by engaging with those around us through building relationships with the people who grow our food, craft our goods, or run the shops we frequent. These social connections provide a sense of belonging and stability in a world that can feel impersonal and chaotic. In choosing to live sustainably, to slow down, and to invest in our local communities, we contribute to a world where sanity can flourish and where we feel more connected to ourselves, each other, and the planet. It's a quiet, thoughtful revolution, one that whispers to us in moments of stillness, asking us to consider: What kind of world do we want to create? And how can we live in a way that sustains not only our environment but also our souls?

Jessica Cichowlas is a Michigan-based sustainability advocate and business owner. In 2024, Chichowlas became the owner of BYOC Co. (Bring Your Own Container) which Is a business that promotes eco-friendly living by offering refillable products to minimize single-use plastic waste. To contact her or view the menu of refill options, visit byocco.com. Visit the store at 25 Jackson Industrial Drive, Suite 500 in Ann Arbor or 550 Forest Avenue, Suite 4 in Plymouth.

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Tomte's Bunny

By Jennifer Carson

Winter is the perfect season to make handmade toys for the new little ones that will be expected in the coming new year. Made from scraps of fabric you'll have on hand or old shirts and bits of ribbon, it's a great destash project. All seams are ¼". Here's what you'll need:

- Cotton or linen for head and ears—fat quarter
- Cotton or linen for body—fat quarter
- 4"x4" Cotton print in light color for inside ears
- Stuffing
- Water soluble marker/pencil
- Embroidery floss
- Fusible fleece* optional
- Scraps of ribbon and other cotton/satin trims
- Blush or colored pencil
- Plastic baby-toy link* also optional
- 1 ½" Plastic rattle (crscrafts.com)
- Freezer paper

To start, copy the pattern from the next page onto freezer paper. Cut these pieces out close to the line, but not on the line.

Fold your fabric for the head and ears in half with right sides together. With a warm iron, press your head pattern piece and your ear pattern piece onto your fabric. Pin and then cut out on the line. Repeat the ear piece with your inner ear fabric.

Fold your fabric for the body in half with right sides together. With a warm iron, press your body pattern piece onto your fabric. Pin and then cut out on the line. When you're done cutting out your pieces, you'll have:

- Two heads
- Two bodies
- Two outside ears
- Two inside ears

Cut four to five 3" pieces of assorted ribbon/trims.

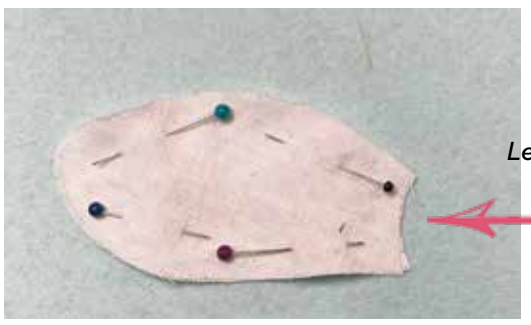
Fold three to four of your ribbon/trim pieces in half and pin on the right-hand side of the body (the side where you have the three notches). Baste in place.

If you want to make a loop to put a toy link through, use your last piece of ribbon and pin to the notch on the bottom of the body. Baste in place.

With right sides together, pin and sew one head to one body.

With a warm iron, press open the seam.

With right sides together, pin and sew one outside ear to one inside ear. Leave



the bottom unstitched. Repeat to make two ears. Turn ears right side out and press with your iron.

With the inner ear facing the right side of the head, pin ears into place on one head piece. Baste in place. This will be your front head/body.

With your water soluble marker, transfer the face onto your front head. If you want a smoother stuffing finish, cut out two pieces of fusible fleece following the head/body shape, and iron on to the back of your head/body pieces. Trim any excess away.

Embroider face with two strands of floss. I used a satin stitch to fill in the eyes and nose and an outline stitch for the mouth. A straight stitch with a single strand of floss is best for his eyebrows and whiskers (if you want to add those!). Wash away your markings after your embroidery is done.

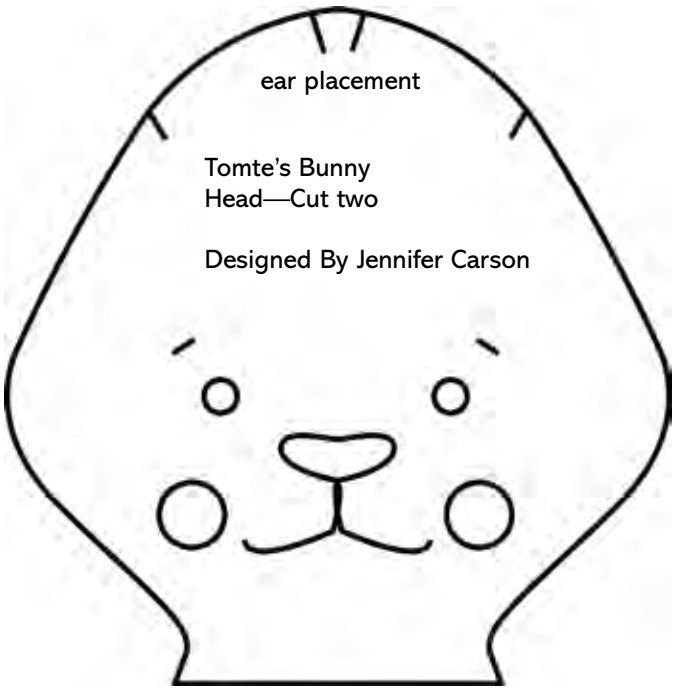
With right sides together, pin the head and body into place. Stitch from one side of the body opening (A), all the way around to the other side of the body opening (B). Clip curves. Turn right side out.

Stuff with your choice of stuffing. Stuff the head and neck really well. Then insert your rattle piece and finish stuffing.

Turn your turning flaps to the inside of the body. Use a ladder stitch to close the opening. Add a little blush to his cheeks.

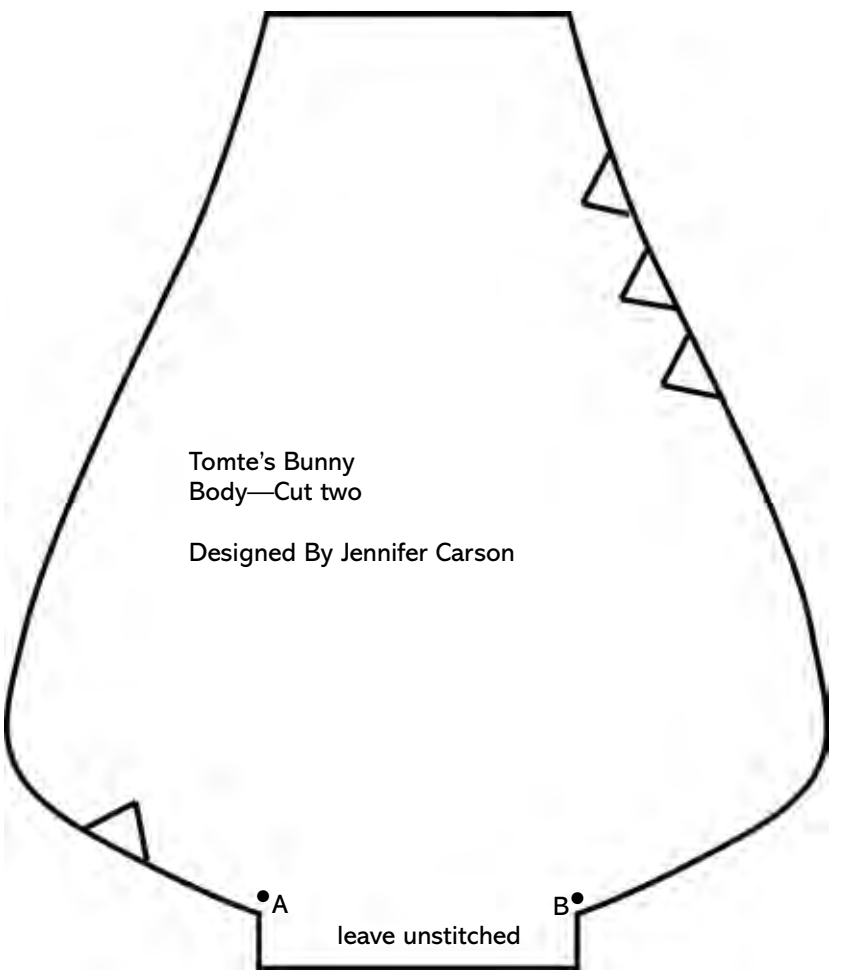
Insert the link into the loop and enjoy the smiles Tomte's bunny brings to a little one you love!

Jennifer Carson is a local author and artist who enjoys creating whimsical art for home and family. You can find over 70 sewing and crafting patterns she has published, her books for kids and the young at heart, and watercolor illustrations on her websites: thedragoncharmer.com and furandfeatherfriends.com.



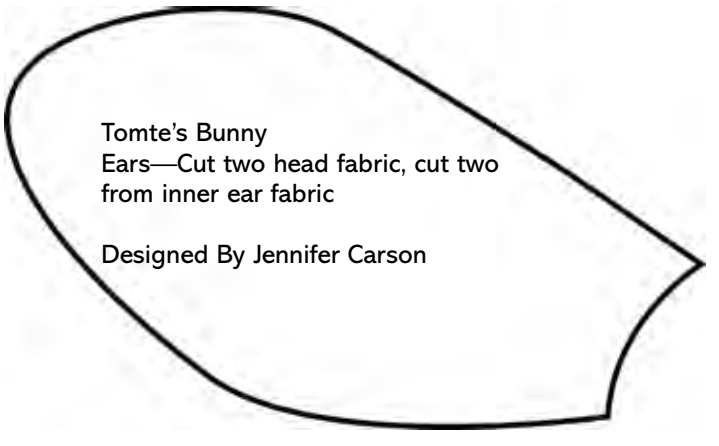
Tomte's Bunny
Head—Cut two

Designed By Jennifer Carson



Tomte's Bunny
Body—Cut two

Designed By Jennifer Carson



Tomte's Bunny
Ears—Cut two head fabric, cut two from inner ear fabric

Designed By Jennifer Carson

Use these full size pattern pieces to make your own Tomte's bunny.

Weekend Getaways

Kelleys Island
By Petula Brown

Heading east toward Kelleys Island, I reminisced about past excursions to Sandusky. Cedar Point and Great Wolf Lodge are well known as family travel destinations, but I never knew that Sandusky is part of the north central region of Ohio known as "Vacationland." While familiar with inland attractions, the Lake Erie islands of Vacationland were completely unknown to me. Considering most of my island experience was growing up in Manhattan, I was curious to experience island living as a low key, accessible getaway miles from familiar seashores.

The feel of the wind and sound of the waves while on Lake Erie served to reset my mind and body for a slower pace.

Driving on the barge-like Kelleys Island Ferry shared with SUV's, commercial vehicles, and pedestrians was a new experience. Drivers left their vehicles to gaze at the horizon on the upper level. The feel of the wind and sound of the waves while on Lake Erie served to reset my mind and body for a slower pace. Approaching Kelleys Island, I noticed a preponderance of golf carts traversing the island reinforcing my sense of Kelleys Island as a resort enclave.

After we docked, I was ready for my first island meal. A few minutes from the ferry dock, you couldn't miss the festive exterior of KI Cantina. The Mexican restaurant's claim to have the Island's smallest bar is offset by having a large outdoor seating area shared with Kelleys Island Wine Company. Though familiar options tacos, burritos, and margaritas were available, I opted for the Power Bowl entrée. Its base of cauliflower rice, Pico, cheeses, and guacamole was appealing to vegetarians, but there was an option to add chicken, pork, or chorizo. With rain clouds on the horizon, I passed on outdoor seating to lounge

A few minutes from the ferry dock, you couldn't miss the festive exterior of KI Cantina. The Mexican restaurant's claim to have the Island's smallest bar is offset by having a large outdoor seating area shared with Kelleys Island Wine Company.

within the Wine Company restaurant. Common ownership between the Cantina and the Wine Company allowed visitors to freely travel between establishments. A broader footprint and subdued pub-like atmosphere provided families and larger parties a spacious area to socialize.

After eating I met Rick and Tricia Kody, the married innkeepers of Water's Edge. Year ago, they were Kelleys Island visitors staying at Water's Edge to celebrate Tricia's birthday. The combination of the intimate setting, sunset views, and the ambient sound of waves on the Lake Erie shore provided a romantic backdrop and memorable experience. Moving toward retirement, and after years of experience as bed and breakfast guests, the Kodys felt a strong affinity toward innkeeping. Months into their search for the ideal property, the Water's Edge hit the market, and the couple purchased the property in the summer of 2019.

The entranceway and wraparound porch are surrounded by impressive landscaping. Floral and herbal varieties provided a visual and aromatic experience that infused the entire property with a sense of calm and relaxation.

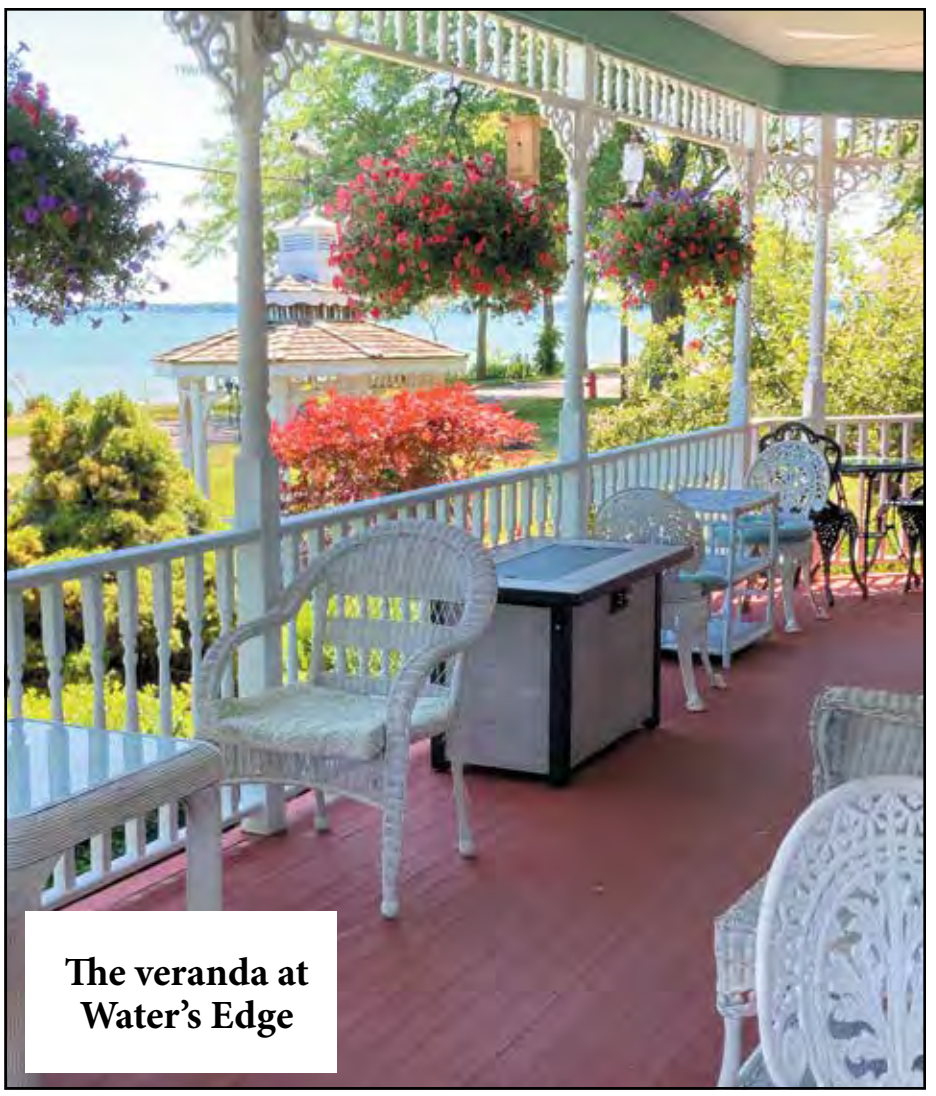
Reinventing themselves as innkeepers, the Kodys had no idea what lay on the horizon their first year. As the world came to grips with Covid, the travel industry faced consumers under lockdown, social distancing, and closed venues. Health-conscious travelers wary of high traffic areas, but clamoring to get out of their homes, looked for drivable destinations in low population locales to minimize exposure. Water's Edge, an intimate cottage on an island, was ideally suited to meet the challenge.

With its distinctive niche as a Kelleys Island luxury property, Water's Edge is well suited to couples, families with adult children, and friend groups. Each of the seven rooms is meticulously decorated and has unique characteristics. Guests staying in the Honeymoon Suite enjoy a private patio and jacuzzi tub

while guests in The Kimono have impressive views of Lake Erie. Solo travelers can enjoy the seclusion (as well as the whirlpool tub) of The Cozy Hideaway. In contrast, guests amenable to using a shared bathroom can reserve The Sweet Sunrise and nearby Daybreak extension which is an appealing option for families and groups.

The locale's attention to detail extended beyond the rooms to the exterior spaces. The entranceway and wraparound porch are surrounded by impressive landscaping. Floral and herbal varieties provided a visual and aromatic experience that infused the entire property with a sense of calm and relaxation. As a cloak of darkness enveloped the area, a starlit sky provided a magical backdrop for the Water's Edge gardens.

Rick and Tricia Kody, the married innkeepers of Water's Edge



The veranda at Water's Edge

Exploring the rustic beauty of East Quarry Trail was the ideal segway to accommodations at The Inn. A short drive west of the trail, The Inn's eclectic and laid-back style is ideal for budget-conscious travelers with school-aged children as well as visitors looking for closer access to downtown venues. Innkeepers Pat and Lori Hayes proudly recount the Inn's start as a private home that's been in the family since the 1800sbeginning with early pioneers Captain Frank E. Hamilton and Erastus Huntington. So, it's not surprising that the restored Victorian home has memorabilia from several eras. Those connections to history came alive when Lori or Pat described architectural features and family mementos found throughout the Inn.

Transitioning to a bed and breakfast in 1905, the owners consider it a "flagship for friendship" with distinctive common areas. Large sofas, a fireplace, and piano provide centerpieces to encourage socializing. Across the spacious front yard, guests have access to a private beach deck available for sunning, fishing, and relaxing during warmer seasons. For visitors interested in a deeper exploration of the island's natural treasures, The Inn can serve as a hub for exploration and education. As board members of the Kelleys Island Audubon Club, Pat and Lori have access to a plethora of information about environmental features that

The Inn's eclectic and laid-back style is ideal for budget-conscious travelers with school-aged children as well as visitors looking for closer access to downtown venues.

The Inn

Kelleys Island

continued...

Photo by Petula Brown

distinguish the locale from other Lake Erie islands. The Inn also offers seasonal activities that focus on nature, such as guided walks and bird-banding sessions.

Considering the B&B's emphasis on the island's natural attractions, I was surprised by its proximity to the downtown scene. Visitors can find restaurants, shops, marinas, and taverns. A mix of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists (including golf carts riders and motor home travelers) navigated the somewhat narrow roadways.

One site in the downtown hub I felt an immediate connection to was The Little Healing Room. Outdoor signage advertising bodywork services caught my attention. Scanning the shop's interior through the main window, displays of essential oil products and wellness publications reminded me of Crazy Wisdom Bookstore. My curiosity led me to schedule a massage session with owner, Patricia Ahner. The 30-minute bodywork appointment morphed into a longer integrative health session with Patricia sharing guidance about maintenance options. The sense of serenity at The Little Healing Room was in stark contrast to other downtown establishments.

My dinner venue, The Village Pump, was a great example of a bustling downtown restaurant with marina and lake views that would appeal to families. The location has a storied history: it was built in the 1800s by Gus Kelley to house a post office and barber shop followed by establishing the first bar on the island after prohibition. But its claim to fame (shared by permanent residents as well as vacation visitors), is its Lake Erie perch dishes; though with a variety of options (including salads, pizza, and sandwiches), there's something for everyone.

I arose the second morning to a symphony of morning bird calls. Their performance and cool morning temperatures inspired me to venture inland to explore more nature-focused settings. Glacial Grooves, arguably the most famous attraction on the island, provided a glimpse of the area's prehistoric roots. Bedrock gouged and scoured by glaciers created grooves that were exposed by quarrying in the 19th century. Quarrying stopped in the 1920s, but fossils can be seen embedded in the rock in a portion of the site at the northern end of the island. Across the road from Glacial Grooves, Kelleys Island State Park provided another area appealing to nature enthusiasts as well as vacationers. Amenities (boat dock, campground, fishing pier, playground, and more) pepper the 2,800-acre site. I welcomed the sandy terrain of the beach area, which better suited my strappy sandals than the rocky shorelines prevalent on other parts of the island. I shared the calm lake view with a variety of avian visitors, including songbirds and waterfowl, which reinforced the island's reputation as a birdwatcher's paradise.

Glacial Grooves, arguably the most famous attraction on the island, provided a glimpse of the area's prehistoric roots.

Photo by Petula Brown

Photo by Petula Brown

The calmness of the park stayed with me as I made my way to the ferry to return home. Kelleys Island had two very distinct personalities. The golf cart gauntlets and bar crawls prevalent in the afternoon and evening give strong signals of a typical vacation spot. Yet, in the early morning, there's a different side to the island: one that embraced the natural landscapes and the creatures that inhabit those spaces. From the ferry, I surveyed the island's fading shoreline. There were areas I hadn't explored, like nature preserves and weekend festivals, that I hope to see in a future visit. The urge to return reinforced the uniqueness of Kelleys Island as a locale that balances its dual nature with aplomb.

You can learn more about the Water's Edge online at watersedgeretreat.com. Find more information about The Inn at innki20.wixsite.com/innofkelleysisland. For general information about Kelleys Island, visit kelleysisland.com.

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